



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard) and JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

Volume 88

(30 September 2013 to 31 October 2013)

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 30 September 2013

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we begin today's business, I wish to inform the House that the Speaker has received the resignation of Mr Kieran McCarthy as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The nominating officer of the Alliance Party, Mr David Ford, has nominated Ms Anna Lo to fill the vacancy with effect from 30 September 2013. Ms Lo has accepted the nomination. The Speaker is satisfied that the requirements of Standing Orders have been met, and I confirm that Ms Lo has taken up office as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges today.

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mrs Dolores Kelly replace Mr Mark H Durkan as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr Fearghal McKinney be appointed as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Ministerial Statement

GCSEs and A Levels: Fundamental Review

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh faoin toradh ar an athbhreithniú ar cháilíochtaí GCSE agus A leibhéal. I want to make a statement regarding the outcome of the review of GCSE and A-level qualifications. I commissioned the review from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) on 1 October last year, and it has now reported.

The review was commissioned following a series of policy announcements in England. Those announcements sparked considerable debate about high-stakes qualifications across these islands. The Secretary of State for Education in England is at liberty to determine what he feels is right for England, but, when the brand is equally shared on a tripartite basis with the North of Ireland and Wales, he and his officials need to give due regard to the implications for those jurisdictions.

As I outlined last year, I do not believe that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the GCSEs and A levels that we have, and CCEA's report confirms that. The report contains 49 recommendations and helpfully condenses into one vehicle a range of short-term, medium-term and long-term actions that will provide a way forward for our next generation of learners.

The report draws on evidence provided by a wide range of stakeholders and was overseen by an expert group. The group consisted of employers, teachers, the FE and HE sectors and education specialists from the South of Ireland and Scotland. I would personally like to thank that expert group for its contribution to this significant work. This is only the start of the process. I am sure that we will continue to call on the members of that group for their views on the detailed work to be taken forward.

The report helpfully builds on the direction of travel that I have set in place here over the past two years, one that is based on engagement with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, including the teaching profession. That involves listening to their views, challenging and testing those views and using their expertise and experience to determine the most appropriate way forward for our learners and our economy.

Among the recommendations is that GCSEs and A levels be retained in the short to medium term, with revisions to reflect the needs of our education policy and the economy. This would allow the qualifications to be developed to

support our curriculum and reflect the needs of employers and higher education. There is also a need for flexibility in the design of GCSE and A-level qualifications to meet individual subject requirements. The qualification system should meet the needs of as wide a range of learners as possible. It is important that study from the age of 14 to 18 enables all our young people to develop wider skills that are of particular importance in further study and employment.

I recognise that the teaching profession is wary of the implications of significant change, particularly in high-stakes qualifications. However, faced with the choice of defining our own policy or following the Secretary of State for Education's proposed reforms in England, there was unanimous support for the former. We will lead our own path and determine our own future.

This review makes recommendations on how GCSEs and A levels might be taken forward and how the focus on improvements in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills could be supported by the qualifications system. It is important that a qualifications system provides opportunities for every young person to achieve his or her potential.

Recommendations have been made to develop, support and value alternative qualification routes to the traditional GCSE and A-level pathway. I welcome that, as it supports the aims of the entitlement framework to provide all our young people with a rich and varied curriculum. The entitlement framework is now statutory in our schools, and the full requirements will be in place by September 2015. It is about providing courses that are relevant to young people, engage and motivate them and provide clear, relevant progression pathways for them to continue in education or move into training or employment. The economy demands that education help young people to prepare for a world of work that is fast changing and very different from when you or I were at school. In 2011-12, some 94.2% of school leavers remained in education, employment or training. We must continue to work to make sure that labour market information informs careers provision, informs choices and informs young people and their parents at the right time.

Young people who see their time in education as relevant are more likely to stay motivated and engaged with their learning. The currency of qualifications taken by learners in the North of Ireland must be ensured. Work must continue to provide young people here with qualifications that will take them wherever they wish to go. In the longer term, the sustainability of the qualifications strategy will have to be considered, taking account of changes being made to the qualifications in England and Wales and discussions on the use of qualification brand names.

The review draws together lessons from international best practice, and I would like to see that work built on in the longer term to promote continuous improvement in our qualifications. We need to start developing the vision now for the qualifications system that we want in 10 to 15 years' time.

I am satisfied that the report reflects opinions on the need for short-term changes, as well as an imperative to take a longer-term view of the qualifications system here. If necessary, that may include the consideration of a system that is independent from but demonstrably comparable with neighbouring jurisdictions. Given its

magnitude and potential impact, I intend to consult on the recommendations in this final report, following which I will announce my decisions on the way forward.

Ba mhaith liom cloisteáil ó CTRÍ, ó ghairm na múinteoireachta, ó bhoird gobharnóirí, ó fhóistóirí, ó thuismitheoirí, agus ó dhaltai. Cuirim fáilte roimh gach tuairim. I want to hear views from MLAs, the teaching profession, boards of governors, employers, parents and pupils alike. All comments are welcome.

This is an extremely important and thought-provoking piece of work. It confirms where we are now and what we should strive for if we are to compete internationally with the best education provision in the world. I want to assure the Assembly that I will continue to take decisions that are in the best interests of all our young people, decisions that will safeguard their future, build on the positive aspects of our current education system and reach forward to the next quarter of the century to provide an international educational passport to success. I commend the review to the Assembly and encourage everyone to contribute to the consultation that will follow.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I thank the Minister for his statement and for facilitating a briefing for me and the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education before he came to the House. I encourage him to make the CCEA report, with its 49 recommendations, available to the Committee and to Members of the House as soon as possible.

I note that the Minister referred to concerns about the way forward. I welcome his recognition of the need to maintain the currency. I have been on public record as saying that we need to ensure that the transportability of our qualifications is not reduced to the proverbial Ulster Bank £5 note when it comes to acceptance in other parts of the United Kingdom. I encourage the Minister to do all in his power to ensure that the issue of transportability is maintained.

This was a very short statement on a very big issue. Perhaps, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will indulge me by allowing me to ask the Minister to tell us a little more about what he plans. I welcome the fact, however, that it seems that he is defending a traditional route this afternoon; maybe that might be transportable to other areas in the public domain at the moment.

The Minister has given us some information, but I would appreciate it if he could expand on that. Has he given up on the three-country model of accreditation, and will he consult further with his counterparts in Westminster on the way forward for GCSEs and A levels? Will he outline to the House the alternative qualification routes and progression pathways that he is consulting on? What elements of international best practice will he draw on in his longer-term plans for qualification systems? Finally, will he now begin, as a matter of urgency, the work of producing a 14-to-19 policy to provide an appropriate format for that important issue? Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Education for his questions.

I have not given up on the three-jurisdictions qualifications, but I suspect that others have. They are perfectly entitled to do so, but they have set a pathway that, they believe,

suits their requirements and education system and their vision for education. I will continue to engage with my English and Welsh counterparts on the way forward. We will share our report and its recommendations with them, and I will be happy to take views from them on the way forward around that. Of course, the report will be made immediately available to the Education Committee and will be available online to all Members and the public as soon as this debate is over.

The Member asked about the international best practice that I referred to. If there are to be radical changes to our education system, the next steps, as proposed in the report, are that we should take up to three years carrying out research and consultation before we reach that stage. That is only right and proper. If we are talking about a fundamental change to our examination systems, I do not believe that that is achievable or desirable in the short term. Let us do it in a planned, mapped-out way that is based on best practice and research, and we will take evidence from international best practice from wherever it may come. That is the way forward.

My officials and officials from DEL continue to engage on the 14- to 19-year-old strategy. I accept that we have not reached a conclusion on it, although one of the recommendations in the report is that we have to move forward with a 14-to-19 strategy. I will take that into account when deciding the way forward.

12.30 pm

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Like the Committee Chair, I welcome the statement. Given the confusion among parents, families and teaching staff about some of the proposed changes in England, it is important to put on record that our Minister has acted to protect the exams that we have and to quell any confusion in this part of Ireland over Michael Gove's changes. That is to be welcomed. Will the Minister outline how he will ensure that our local exams remain robust and that qualifications remain portable throughout these islands?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. Portability and the currency of exams has been foremost in my mind, and the expert review group touched on the issue several times in the report. I want to continue to see a situation in which students and potential employees can travel across these groups of islands with their examination results. In my statement, I referred to qualifications as a passport, and that is vital for our young people and our economy. It was commented on the radio this morning that it is surely not beyond our wit to achieve that, and I do not believe that it is. For example, the Scots run a completely different examinations system from England, Wales, us or the South of Ireland, and students are able to transfer back and forth quite easily. The Dublin Government run a different exams system again, and many students travel back and forth. Many international students also travel to our universities here and across the water.

The issue of comparability can and will be resolved. The report refers to the need for the regulatory bodies to engage constantly with one another, and I support that. I believe that discussion and interrogation of one another's exams systems is perfectly possible and that we will be able to move forward with a system in which our young

people are able to travel wherever they wish, confident that their exams will be recognised.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis agus as ucht a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire an aontaíonn sé liom gur chóir líon na n-ábhar feidhmeach a mhéadú ag an dá leibhéal, GCSE agus ard leibhéal, sa dóigh is gur féidir cúrsaí oideachais agus cúrsaí fostaíochta a cheangal níos dlúithe le chéile?

Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers. Does he agree that it would be useful to increase the number of applied subjects at GCSE and A level? That would help to ensure that education and employment were more closely aligned.

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question.

The report examined that issue in some detail. We have to place equal value on academic studies and what are commonly known as vocational studies. The report looked at alternative examinations for students who do not wish to go on to study A levels and may wish to go down other pathways. We have to examine that further as part of our work on the future of our examinations systems. The report recommends that that should happen over the next 10 to 15 years, although there will be shorter-term measures.

There are many pathways for our young people, and we have to be conscious that not all young people may want or be able to follow an academic route. It may not suit their needs or, I have to say, those of the economy. As a society, as parents, as careers advisers and as employers, we have to place equal value on academic and vocational qualifications. The report concentrates on that and makes recommendations on the need to bring forward a new set of qualifications that are valued equally beside all other qualifications.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement and very much welcome its broad direction.

From the meetings of the Westminster Education Committee, we note that the differences that have arisen over GCSEs are deeply regrettable. What action has the Minister taken to try to stop these divisions occurring? Will he elaborate on what he said about what he is putting in place to make sure that we know exactly what the Welsh and English will be doing? As an aside, did he or the Department respond to Ofqual's consultation on GCSEs?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not in a position to comment on what the Westminster Committee said about qualifications there. As I have said, the Secretary of State for Education in England is perfectly entitled to make whatever decisions he feels fit about his education system. However, I would offer some caution: where it affects the three jurisdictions, better communication and consultation should be in place before those decisions are made. I intend to share this report with my English and Welsh counterparts and, indeed, with my Scottish and Dublin counterparts for qualifications moving forward. I want to ensure that there are discussions and communications between the three.

I am not sure whether the Department responded to the Ofqual report that you refer to. I suspect that it was largely about changes that were taking place in England. We have

had discussions. I have met Michael Gove, and my officials have had discussions with his officials on the way forward on GCSEs. Others are making decisions that they feel are right for their jurisdiction, and we have had to react to that. I think that the pathway mapped out in this report allows us to react to it in a measured, thought-out way without making any knee-jerk reactions and, at the same time, ensures that our qualifications are mutually respected across these islands, that they are portable and that the currency of the qualifications can and will be respected.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am beginning to feel my age a little bit, because I can remember when the O levels were changed over to GCSEs. I was not in the first year of that but a couple of years after.

Others have mentioned portability. Does the Minister envisage that, to best prepare our young people, there may be a need for flexibility to teach some subjects slightly differently? For example, the modular system could be continued for some so that certain topics can be explored further over a longer period, whereas others may be better tested under formal exam conditions at the end of year 12.

Mr O'Dowd: When Mr Gove previously made changes to the modular and linear system in England, we carried out a consultation with the sectors, and it came back that our education system valued modular education in the appropriate subjects. I decided at that time to keep modular in the appropriate subjects, and I intend to do that. The report published today also suggests that we should move forward with modular and linear. There is no research that would direct us to either being the superior model, although many of our local educationalists tell me that modular learning suits our young people. It allows them to progress at their pace, although it continues to test them and to ensure that young people's abilities are brought out. So, I intend to continue with modular and linear.

I met with a number of the English and Welsh exam bodies last week. They are going to change their system to provide only linear. They wanted to know whether I was going to allow them to continue to operate here. I said that I would allow them to continue to operate here as long as their exams did not corrupt our curriculum and we were not making changes to our curriculum to meet the needs of exam bodies rather than the other way round. I have asked my officials to continue those engagements. I found the engagement with the bodies very useful, and I have asked my officials to continue to engage with them on the way forward as we work our way through this report and as they, as exam bodies, work their way through the changes that are being implemented in England.

Mr Craig: Minister, your statement says that the report was provided by a:

"range of stakeholders and was overseen by an expert group."

That group consisted of employers, teachers, FE and HE sectors and education specialists from, as I noted with interest, the South of Ireland and Scotland. I ask the obvious question: why were there not experts there from England and Wales as well? Probably the key thing that we want to maintain in these islands is equivalence of exam qualifications. As you state, this is also only the start of the

process. Can we have a guarantee from the Minister that that expertise will be there in future?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member that my officials and I continue to engage with the Department for Education in England. My officials and I have a very good working relationship with the Department for Education and Skills in Wales. There is a constant flow of information and, for want of a better term, pre-warning of any proposals that are coming from Wales in this direction.

The Department for Education in England has its way of working, and that is how it works. I cannot direct it to work in a different way. It has made its decisions on how it operates and works. At times, those do not offer the most helpful way forward, but we keep lines of communication open and will continue to do so.

The expert group was brought together from the different jurisdictions because Scotland is not going through a change programme. Scotland has its examinations in place, and they are completely different from what we have. The South has a different exam system again. It went through some changes to the junior certificate, but it brought a different perspective to the GCSE debate. That is why I thought that it was of value to the expert group. The list of members on the expert group is in the report, and it brings together a mixed range of backgrounds and career pathways, which added only value to our report. The group was useful, and I thank it for its work.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. In the best interests of all our young people and their academic abilities, what long-term opportunities may be created with the changes announced today?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not wish to pre-empt the long-term changes to our qualification system. Although I am on record as saying that I would not have commenced down this pathway at this stage, the decisions that were made in England allowed us to start a journey, which we have yet to map out the final pathway to. It has allowed us to start a debate about our qualifications, what they should be and what they should test and bring out in our young people.

In the long term, I want to see a qualification system that allows all our young people to cherish their education and allows us to test the abilities of all our young people. I want a system that our universities, employers, parents and young people understand and in which we value all qualifications. As I said to a previous contributor, we should place equal value on academic and vocational qualifications because the changing nature of our economy means that our young people have to be flexible in their skills and in their ability to deliver those skills in the workplace.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his statement, which mentioned the focus on improvements in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Given that we heard again on the radio this morning about ICT skills shortages, will the Minister give assurances that he will consult those sectors to endeavour to have relevant, up-to-date IT and ICT GCSEs that fit the market?

Mr O'Dowd: I can assure the Member of that. Over the past number of weeks, I have engaged with employers from a wide range of backgrounds, including those who require IT skills in their companies. Those discussions

were enlightening about the skills base that exists and the absence of skills. One of our major employers had to go to India to recruit because the appropriately qualified people are not here. That sets alarm bells off in my head right away. I will take a particular interest in the report and its recommendations, particularly around IT, ICT skills and computer science.

I am not convinced that we have got it right just yet or that we start at an early enough age. The report looks at our qualifications, and I also want to see what more we can do in our primary schools with computer science to turn our young people on to that skills base.

12.30 pm

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis ar maidin.

It has been mentioned a number of times this morning that it is important to have equivalent qualifications across these islands. I do not disagree with that. However, it is not more important that whatever qualification system we come up with is based on international best practice? If we use that criterion, then it does not matter where young people go because their qualifications will always be welcomed.

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. The simple answer to that is yes, because young people here now compete in an international market. We want to be able to ensure that young people here leave school highly qualified, highly motivated and highly skilled and that we invest in our local economy.

Some young people will choose to travel. We want to attract international investors by ensuring that they can be confident that young people here are highly qualified. That is the way forward. Although it may be very comforting and reassuring at times to look around this group of islands and judge ourselves against the exam systems in England, Scotland, Wales or down South, we have to judge ourselves against the international best. That is where we want to be. I want to see our exam system being examined by others and held up as the way forward. That is where we need to get to in the next number of years.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. I particularly welcome the evolutionary nature of the whole process. Is it anticipated that there will be increased demand for our qualifications both from students here who do English board exams at present and students from England and Wales who are attracted to the continuation of a modular approach?

Mr O'Dowd: As I have said previously, I certainly want our exam system to be held up as an international example of the way forward. As I also said to a previous contributor, I am allowing an open market to remain with the English and Welsh boards delivering exams here as long as that does not corrupt our curriculum. If it starts to corrupt our curriculum, I will have to look at that again. Throughout the report, the consultation which led to its development, previous changes that I made to the examination system and the consultation contained in that, modular exams were highly regarded in the education system. I intend to keep them. I would like others to look at our examples and say that they want them in their schools also. However, as far as I am aware, changes being made in England have

completely ruled out modular exams in their system. Again, that is a matter for them.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement and his interesting responses so far. Can he detail what Department, public organisation or industry body will, ultimately, be responsible for informing business and employers about the practical differences between the new qualifications? I believe that there will be concern about the restriction on students' ability to partake of only one resit, particularly in English and maths, as many employers to whom I talk emphasise the need for those subjects. Can the Minister indicate his assessment of the English suggestion that students can resit ad infinitum?

Mr O'Dowd: I have to say that I am not comfortable talking about another jurisdiction's decisions. It is for others to do that. We have to ensure that young people who travel through the education system for 12 or 13 years are, at the end of that, capable of passing exams in English and maths which meet the needs of the young person and the economy. That is where we want to be. During a previous consultation, concerns were expressed about the number of resits available and whether that devalued the exam when it was achieved. I accepted those concerns. I believe that the resits that have been offered are appropriate and ensure that young people are tested on ability and that that ability can be expressed in the workplace. I am sorry: I have forgotten the first part of the Member's question. I will take guidance from the Chair on whether there is an opportunity to restate it.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister detail what Department or organisation will inform employers of the difference in qualifications?

Mr O'Dowd: As part of the review, I insisted that a wide range of employers were involved in discussions. As we move the report forward and as the consultation is brought to an end, whatever recommendations come out of that, I want to ensure that employers are on board and are part of moving that forward, including the development of new exams, because my discussions over the last period have been very useful.

We all meet and engage regularly with business leaders and employers. There is a separation between education and employers, and we need to close that gap. We need to ensure that our schools understand what employment is going on and what employment opportunities are out there, and vice versa. I do not have the answers to that yet. Hence, we are going out to consultation. Whatever comes out of this, employers and education have to be one and the same.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his statement and, indeed, his answers so far. Minister, my concerns are very much the same as those of Mrs Overend. I assume that, for pupils who do GCSEs and A levels in Northern Ireland and decide to go to university, there will be a benchmark against which they can sell their qualifications when looking for employment opportunities. From listening to your answers to Mrs Overend, I am not quite clear whether there is a route for employers, employer organisations or other outside bodies to benchmark the Northern Ireland qualifications against those that will come into being in England. That is particularly important where a young person does not go to university but seeks employment based on his GCSEs and A levels.

Mr O'Dowd: The benchmarking of qualifications here against those in England, Wales, Scotland and down South will be carried out by the regulator. There is a system in place to carry out that work. We have to ensure that the regulators engage with each other, which they are, and that the outcomes of that — knowledge, skills etc — are transferred back to employers, parents, schools etc so that when career pathways are being decided in schools, everyone knows what qualifications are required, whether you are staying here or are moving to university elsewhere.

I am not here to say that I have all the answers at this stage. The report poses 49 recommendations. It poses questions to me, as Minister, and to our society about the way forward for qualifications. I am sending that out to consultation. There is no point in me standing here and saying, "These are 49 great recommendations. I have all the answers", because, currently, I do not have all the answers. However, I am confident that, given the research work carried out to date and the recommendations in the report, we will be able to map a steady course through an evolving education system and qualification system into the future. I am confident of that because, when I look around these islands, I see that the Welsh are currently mapping their way through that and the Scottish have done so previously. Their exam systems are highly regarded, the qualifications are transferable and their currency is respected.

Part of the report concentrates on the views of employers. I encourage all Members to read the report and particularly that paragraph. It is quite enlightening to hear the views of the employers who came back to the expert group. I think that that is an important element of the report. As I said to Mrs Overend, moving forward, the views of employers will not be ignored.

Mr Dallat: The Minister told us a few times this morning that he does not have all the answers. Is that not why pupils very often fail their exams?

The Minister is, I believe, trying to make school more relevant to the workplace, and we all welcome that. What plans does he have to afford teachers the opportunity to spend time in the workplace? Likewise, what incentives are there for people in the workplace to join the teaching profession?

Mr O'Dowd: Perhaps the wrong answer is as bad as no answer. I think that if I were to stand up at this stage — at the start of a consultation process — and say, "Behold, I have all the answers", I would be accused of ignoring the consultation. So let the consultation continue. The report that we are publishing today is very well informed, and I think that Members and educators will find it useful. Let us respond by having a debate about where we want to see our qualification system going in the future.

The question of providing opportunities for teachers to spend time in employment other than education needs to be thrashed out.

Are we prepared to finance periods of leave for our teachers to work in industry? I think that we should.

Recently, I have been having conversations with employers about why we are not using more modern technology to bring the classroom into the workplace and vice versa. Many of our leading businesspeople are very busy, but they want to contribute society, and we should use more modern technology to allow those people to

come into the classroom via the internet, or whatever way it may be, and let them speak directly to teachers and vice versa.

We are looking at teacher training. We recruit many of our teachers straight out of post-primary school at 18, 19 and 20 years of age. They are highly qualified and motivated, and they are great young people. Perhaps we should recruit them at 25 or 30 years of age to go into training colleges, to allow them the experience of the workplace or different environments before they go into the classroom. However, that question will be posed as part of a review of teacher education.

Mr Allister: My concern about where this may be going is its impact on the buying power of our local qualifications. If Secretary of State Gove is making GCSEs and A levels more rigorous in the greater part of the United Kingdom, namely England, and we cling to the easier processes of modules and assessment, will the losers not be our own students, who emerge with qualifications that will be deemed lesser when compared with those in the majority of the United Kingdom? It is the question of portability. The Minister said that he is interested in that, but he is not interested enough to have had on his expert panel someone from the greater part of the United Kingdom — England — where those changes are being made to understand the whys, wherefores and outworkings. I repeat Mr Craig's question: why was that, and will the Minister seriously address the portability question?

Mr O'Dowd: You should not have an inferiority complex about our continuing ability to deliver rigorous exams. What educational research evidence do you use to state that the changes being made in England will make its examination system more rigorous? I challenge you to produce it. I assure you that the research panel, my Department and I, and others have studied this subject intensely, and no one can produce for me the educational research to suggest that the changes being made in England make its examination system more rigorous. There is certainly no research to suggest anything about the changes that we have introduced here or that will maybe flow from our recommendations. However, we will take three years, as proposed in the report, to establish a new examination system. As part of that, we will study what is happening in England and across the world and will end up with a rigorous examination system. It is a severe case of an inferiority complex, which the Member is not usually renowned for, if he believes that, because we do not follow England, our exam system will be easier. There is no research to support your thinking on that, and given your reputation as a man who interrogates subjects, I suggest that you interrogate that one a bit further.

Mr McCallister: In the Minister's earlier replies, he spoke about not wanting the process to be insular. How can he guarantee that, when seemingly all we have heard so far is that it will be very much a Northern Ireland model? If he goes down that road, and it becomes insular, how will he benchmark success, and how will we know what success looks like? Indeed, as Mr Allister said, how do you guarantee that standard? How does he stop what is effectively a two-tiered system developing between our secondary schools and grammar schools if they opt for different systems?

12.45 pm

Mr O'Dowd: All our schools, regardless of the title on the gate, teach the same curriculum, and the entitlement framework will be across all our schools by 2015. Indeed, it is being rolled out. So all our schools have to be entitlement-framework compliant, which means that they have to teach a wide range of subjects across academia, vocational skills etc. They have to offer those to their pupils. Schools will require an examination system that offers exams for all those young people. So I am not overly concerned that, in some way, two different systems will develop from this.

Throughout the changes announced in England, and their impacts here, we as a Department have been very careful to engage with our local educationalists and learn from best practice across this group of islands and, indeed, elsewhere before making any decisions. The report that I publish today recommends that we take three years to research and evaluate the best way forward to match our exam system with the best in the world.

How will we benchmark it? How do the Scottish benchmark their exam system? It can be done, as Scotland has proved. How does the South of Ireland benchmark its exam system? It can and will be done. The Welsh are moving in a different direction from Mr Gove. Indeed, Mr Gove will have to benchmark his system as well. We should not be thinking that, if there is a break in the GCSE and A-level link, we will be at sea on our own, and it will be impossible for us to compare our exam systems against the best in the world. It is done currently, it will be done in the future, and I have every confidence that, after the work carried out in producing this report, we will have an exam system that we can continue to be proud of.

As I said in my statement, I do not believe that GCSEs and A levels were so fundamentally flawed that they required overhauling at his stage. Others made decisions that gave us the opportunity to do something similar or different, but let us ensure that whatever we do is based not on press releases or statements made elsewhere but on research.

Executive Committee Business

Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

That the draft Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

The Lands Tribunal is a court of record established under the Lands Tribunal and Compensation Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 and deals with a variety of civil disputes. My Department is responsible for the administration of the tribunal and for determining the remuneration of its judiciary. The tribunal's judiciary currently consists of a president, one valuer member and a temporary member, all of whom were appointed by the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

The draft order before the House provides for an increase in the remuneration of the tribunal's judiciary, effective from 1 April this year. It is made under powers contained in the 1964 Act, which provides that the draft of the order must be approved by the Assembly. The draft order provides for an increase in the office holders' salaries of 1%. This follows the announcement by the Prime Minister on 14 March that the Government had decided to increase judicial salaries by 1%, based on the recommendation of the Review Body on Senior Salaries.

Judicial salaries were last increased in April 2009. This announcement, therefore, follows the end of a three-year pay freeze. The Department of Finance and Personnel has approved the increase, and I would like to thank the Committee for Justice for its consideration of the draft order and its support for the proposal. I commend the order to the House.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I am pleased to speak as Chairman of the Committee. As the Minister outlined, the rule provides for increases in the annual salary of the president and other members of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland. It is in line with the 2013 report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries and the subsequent announcement by the Prime Minister in a written statement in March that the Government had decided that judicial salaries should increase by 1%. On that basis, the Committee agreed that it was content with the statutory rule, and, therefore, supports the motion today.

Speaking in a personal capacity, I think that there is, perhaps, something for the Department to look at. It seems a little odd that we have to deal with an affirmative resolution procedure for a pay increase in the region of £1,300 to £1,400, and it has to come to the Assembly. Indeed, I think that one individual will not even benefit from this.

Yet we deal with the likes of legal aid, which handles millions of pounds and impacts on the whole legal profession, by way of negative resolution. It seems strange that the 1964 Act requires this detail of debate — if that exciting debate follows — and yet the vast majority of other issues for the Committee are dealt with by way of negative resolution. I am of the view that that should be regularised in order that it be treated in the same fashion as negative resolution. I do not envisage a problem in taking that course of action on this issue. Nevertheless, the 1964 Act

requires the Assembly to debate this, and the Committee has indicated its support for the order to go through.

Mr Ford: I thank the Chair for expressing the Committee's opinion so lucidly, and I agree with Paul Givan in the sentiments that he personally expressed. The fact that the 1964 Act requires this to go through by way of affirmative resolution is no doubt something that, as we tidy up what has not been done right in the period before devolution, we will have to add to, although on this occasion we are blaming the previous Stormont Parliament rather than blaming Westminster, which makes a slight change. He also correctly identified that one of the individual members, because he is the Lord Justice of Appeal, will not be affected by the order. Having noted those interesting historical quirks, I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Committee Business

Financial Provisions Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We may have a difficulty continuing in that we do not have a quorum. *[Interruption.]* I call Mr Daithí McKay.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 December 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Financial Provisions Bill (NIA Bill 22/11-15).

The Financial Provisions Bill was introduced to the Assembly on 17 June 2013 and received its second reading on 1 July 2013. The Bill consists of six substantive clauses and one schedule.

The main purpose of the Bill is to adjust statutory limits and to address other routine financial matters for various Departments. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is the lead department, and, therefore, the Finance and Personnel Committee is coordinating the scrutiny of the Bill. However, the Bill includes a range of provisions relating to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Justice, the Department for Social Development and the Audit Office. The Committee for Finance and Personnel sought early comment from the relevant Assembly Committees and raised issues of relevance in advance of Second Stage. Further written responses have also been invited from interested stakeholders during the Committee Stage.

In respect of the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Committee was recently briefed by departmental officials on two proposed amendments to the Bill that will make provision for rating. On 11 September, officials informed the Committee that the Minister will bring forward these amendments at Consideration Stage. The first amendment concerns the early payment discount and will seek to extend the current discount that is allowed for the early repayment of rates on occupied dwellings to include unoccupied dwellings or empty homes.

The second proposed amendment is technical in nature and will seek to clarify the need for ratepayers to provide an effective date of occupation to Land and Property Services (LPS). Departmental officials advised that this will allow LPS to get much more accurate information for the purposes of rates billing and, in particular, the backdating of rates. The Committee is due to receive further briefing when the wording of the amendments becomes available.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules has also considered the delegated powers memorandum submitted by DFP, and raised issues in relation to powers of the Department of Justice to make subordinate legislation. We anticipate that that may also result in further amendments tabled for Consideration Stage.

Given the evidence that remains to be collected on the Bill and the content of amendments to be examined, the Committee is seeking an extension to ensure that it can conduct the appropriate level of scrutiny required.

The extension is also being sought in the context of a Committee work programme that is fully committed until Halloween recess, with the Committee Stage of the Public Service Pensions Bill taking priority. The proposed date of extension, which has been agreed with the Department, will allow for existing work pressures to be met, as well as any unforeseen business. I therefore seek an extension to the deadline for the Committee Stage until 13 December 2013 to allow the Committee sufficient time to reach a considered position and report on the Bill to the Assembly.

I ask Members to give their support to the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 December 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Financial Provisions Bill (NIA Bill 22/11-15).

Private Members' Business

Exploitation of Children and Young People

Mr Principal 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 will have 10 minutes in which to propose the amendment and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent revelations regarding the abuse and exploitation of children and young people; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to liaise with the Minister of Justice to initiate an inquiry to ascertain the prevalence of abuse and exploitation of children both in care and elsewhere; and further calls on all relevant Departments to outline the strategies that will be put in place to safeguard and protect all children and young people.

I start by reinforcing the last line of the motion, which is that all that we do is about strategies that will protect children and young people. Everything that we do in the House and beyond to highlight and eradicate that abuse needs to be child-centred and about safeguarding and protecting our children and young people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

No one can ignore the public exposure of the issues over the past few weeks. However, we should not be shocked, as the issue was highlighted in a Barnardo's report that was published in 2011. Its research dates back to 2009. In effect, the work is four years old. In fact, I can confirm to the House that a Social Services Inspectorate report titled 'Our Children and Young People — Our Shared Responsibility' was commissioned in 2006. Although the vulnerable nature of young people involved in sexual exploitation is shocking, particularly when we learn that some of them do not even realise that they are being abused, it is just as shocking that reports date back to 2006 in which organisations and agencies were recommended and mandated to respond to the abuse of children. That, in anybody's terms, is wrong and has failed children.

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

Although I appreciate that a huge amount of work goes on in social services to protect children, the fact remains that 18 children left care facilities over 400 times in an 18-month period. That is nothing short of failure. Although I am not advocating that those children be locked up, we need to ensure that the law is robust so that it enshrines the protection of children as paramount and that that is the judgement taken in all those situations.

'Minimum Standards for Children's Homes' states:

"The home considers with the placing authority what action should be taken to prevent the child or young person going missing in future."

It refers to the statutory implementation of the North of Ireland guidance on missing children in homes policy. If a child's whereabouts is known to the PSNI, assistance must be sought. Regional guidance for police involved in residential units was published by the Health and Social Care Board and the PSNI in May 2012. Although it is apparent that child sexual exploitation is not an offence under the Sexual Offences Order 2008, there is enough to act if harbourers are used. Article 21 concerns the arranging or facilitating commission of a sex offence against a child.

1.00 pm

So, if options exist within the law, if safeguarding boards are in place and if joint protocols exist, why have we failed these children? Although I very much welcome the Health Minister's change of heart, going from considering appointing an independent expert to reviewing practices and then, finally, to establishing an independent expert-led inquiry, a number of questions still need to be answered. Following his statement, during public interviews the Minister referred to an "investigation". That is not what is required. An inquiry with proper independence, powers to investigate and accountability mechanisms is required. We should not be afraid to learn the lessons, and, if Departments have failed after they have been mandated to act, they will need to be accountable.

The Barnardo's report had six recommendations. Five were in the remit of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the sixth was the responsibility of the Department of Justice. Recommendation 3 requested that the Health and Social Care Board develop a:

"targeted and fully resourced action plan ... that includes consideration of ... data collection and monitoring; professional competency and capacity; best practice models ... including ... a co-located inter-agency model of response; regional implementation of the sexual exploitation risk assessment tool; resourcing of a regional specialist support service."

It was recommended that the Public Health Agency develop a public campaign to:

"raise awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and young people."

However, at the joint Health and Justice Committee meeting of the past few weeks, we were told that this is only the beginning of some of these processes. I remind Members that all six of those recommendations were commissioned by the Department of Health and were launched publicly in 2011.

I also remind the House that the children order was established in 1995, which is some 18 years ago. That order requires an examination that ensures that the protection of children and young people is paramount. Although the focus in this current investigation has been on children in care, child sexual exploitation will be happening to children in the community who are not known to social services. It is vital, therefore, that we get messages to parents who may be concerned about their children. NSPCC has initiated a public helpline, and its number is 0800 389 1701. Since 16 September, there have

been 13 enquiries, resulting in 10 referrals to PSNI and social services. That is 10 referrals in 14 days.

On Wednesday 25 September, the Minister of Health announced in a written statement to the Assembly that he and the Minister of Justice will set up an independent expert-led inquiry. No further detail has been provided on that. There is no further detail on the nature of the inquiry, the powers that it will have or whether it will be a public inquiry that experts will lead or whether it will take evidence and hear witnesses. It is our view and the view of the Children's Law Centre and other groups supporting children and young people that this inquiry must be robust, fully independent and equipped with all the necessary resources and powers to address the abuse that has taken place. The inquiry must acknowledge the experiences of the children and young people who have been abused. Critically, it must look at the failures that have allowed child sexual exploitation to continue.

I note that the Health and Social Care Board produced a strategic action plan in August 2010 entitled 'Children Missing from Home or Care'. That was never consulted on, disseminated or acted on. It is now fundamental to the credibility of any inquiry established to address child sexual exploitation that it is wholly independent. Independence must be real and viewed as such by the children involved, the agencies of government and the public.

Although the Safeguarding Board plays an important role in safeguarding children, given the jurisdictional nature of the issue and the fact that the Safeguarding Board is constituted of people representing bodies that have a current statutory duty to protect children, it may be perceived — probably wrongly — that the Safeguarding Board may not be independent enough to examine those cases. Transparency is critical. Although the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and the Criminal Justice Inspection do an excellent job, they will not be perceived as sufficiently independent to carry out the inquiry. In that context, it is vital that the inquiry examines why, when it was known that child sexual exploitation was happening from at least 2006, the Departments failed to protect those children.

Any proposed inquiry must also be set within the framework of international human rights standards. What does not appear to have been included in the proposed remit at present is an examination of whether any failings have occurred regarding the Health Department's obligations to children and young people. There does not appear to be any accountability mechanism for those failings within the proposed remit. This is an opportunity to address an awful blight in our communities and societies. We all need to remain focused.

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Nothing short of a full, independent, robust inquiry can provide us with those answers.

Mr Beggs: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "protect" and insert

"all children and young people."

It is important that we put in place safeguarding and protection strategies that will cover all our young children; it is not just about the children in care. Yes, we need to have a particular focus on them, but we have to ensure that all vulnerable children, particularly those living in our communities, are also adequately protected.

I picked up on some comments at the end of last week from a child carer who had been talking to a group of young people. The comment that was reported in the media was, "Why are the officials arguing when we are still being raped?" Let us make sure that we move forward constructively, take the lessons and solve the difficulties that are there. After all that is done, let us spend as much time as it takes to investigate the past, but let us try to prevent the abuse that is happening now today. It is important that we move forward.

Why did I feel that it was necessary to table an amendment to the original motion? In the evidence to the joint Health and Justice Committee, Seán Holland, chief social services officer, said:

"Children in care are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation for a number of reasons, particularly the experiences that probably led them to being in care in the first place. However, the academic evidence is that they represent only about 20% of children likely to experience childhood sexual exploitation. So it is a much bigger issue than just children who are in care."

For that primary reason, I felt that it was important for us to look at the safeguarding and protection of all children.

The statistic recently highlighted was that 22 young people have been sexually exploited while in care. There is a lot of information stating that that is just the tip of the iceberg. There may well be other children in care also suffering, but even just look at those 22. If those statistics, which have been established from desktop research, are accurate, we can expect there to be 80 more young children in Northern Ireland being sexually exploited in the community where they are living. So, it is important that, while focusing on the children in care, who are particularly vulnerable, we must also ensure that we look at other young children in our community who are equally vulnerable.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He has outlined that 20% of children are in care, in addition to the greater number of children who are not. Therefore, does he agree that it is essential that the wider community gets the unanimous message from the Assembly that it is the care of and compassion for all children that must be the defining factor of the outcome of today's deliberations?

Mr Beggs: I accept that absolutely. Given the fact that sexual exploitation is occurring in the community, it is important that we do not overlook that fact, and that we do not stigmatise the children who are in care. The life that they have experienced so far is not their fault. However, it is important that we recognise the scale of the problem that exists beyond our care homes. It is important that the community — neighbours, friends, and children and young people in schools — watch out for warning signs and feed their concerns into the system so that they can be addressed at the earliest possible opportunity, and so that fewer children reach our care homes and experience such difficulties in their life.

I notice from the recent child protection referral statistics that, at 30 June 2013, 1,790 children and young people are on the child protection register. There are 436 in the Northern Trust; 378 in the Belfast Trust; 359 in the South Eastern Trust; 316 in the Southern Trust, and 301 in the Western Trust. Those young people are deemed to be vulnerable. However, it is widely known that that vulnerability can often expose them to additional risks. I have no doubt that there are predators in the community who would spot a vulnerability — a lack of parenting assistance perhaps — and try to take advantage of that. So, it is important that, as a community, we look together to try to combat that and protect some of the weakest members in our community, those vulnerable children. We must look after all children in our community. It is not just about the children in care.

The third reason for the amendment is that, if we are actually going to empower our children and young people against grooming and predators who try to ingratiate themselves and ultimately abuse and misuse them, it is important that we work at the earliest possible stage. There is no point simply working with children once they reach care and have a very thorough protection and safeguarding system at that stage. We must work at the earliest stage, right from primary-school age children. Take, for example, stranger danger; we must start warning all our children and young people, with age-appropriate messages, of the dangers that exist.

There has been a lot of concern recently around how inappropriate relationships are built over the internet, through Facebook etc. It is important that children and young people are educated in that with, I say once again, age-appropriate information. Ultimately, where children are vulnerable, they have to be told about the dangers of grooming. Where there is a clear risk for older children, that must be talked about. It goes much wider than our care homes. We have to start in the community, in schools and in youth clubs. Perhaps some vulnerable children are not at school regularly.

So, we must work out how we are going to get the message to such vulnerable children, how we are going to look after them and how we are going to support families with difficulties. In my own constituency, I am aware of some very successful programmes with families where relationships had become estranged. By early intervention — perhaps for children deemed to be at risk of offending — and by working with the family, the parent and the child, great improvements can be made at that early stage so that family breakdown does not happen, so that children become less vulnerable, so that normal parenting support is there and so that we are not reliant on our care homes, with the difficult relationships that exist there.

We must be cognisant of our social workers who work in care homes. It is a very difficult job. They are working with young people who have been frequently damaged by their life experience, and there are regulations and restrictions in respect of what you can and cannot do. Do we want children in our care homes all placed under lock and key? That would be a fire hazard to start with. What are we going to do in terms of restraining? When is it appropriate? If you are going to rely on that as a last resort, I say that that is much too late. We must put greater emphasis at the earlier stage, have earlier intervention, work through the

community and give better education and support so that fewer of our vulnerable children reach that stage.

1.15 pm

Equally, we must continue to fund Safe Choices, which is the very successful programme that Barnardo's has been running. It tries to befriend and to help to make many young people aware that they are in abusive relationships, as they might not recognise that they are in such relationships, because abusive adults have befriended them and, ultimately, have betrayed those friendships and are abusing them. So, I think that it is important to widen it to all our children at that earlier stage.

Turning briefly to some of the wider issues, I agree that it is important that we have an independent inquiry, which the Minister has set up. It is equally important that we have a speedy inquiry and that we concentrate on learning lessons and not looking back into the past for the sake of it but making sure that we have the best possible procedures in place today so that we can safeguard and protect the children of today. There is great concern and danger that, if we look back at what happened in the past, the cooperation that has been happening could fall apart and the protection may not be as good as it should be.

I have spoken to some social workers, and they have told me that they have been aware that this has been going on for 30 years. This is nothing new. There have been abusive adults in our society.

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

Mr Beggs: We must get wiser and better and protect our children in need.

Mr Wells: There is no doubt that this is one of the most serious issues that the Assembly will debate in this mandate. We have to accept that the basic building blocks of our society that protect our children are rapidly breaking down. We have a huge increase in the number of relationship failures. We have social media, the internet and the shocking statistic that 90% of boys under 16 years of age in the United Kingdom have been exposed to hard-core pornography. These are all issues that many of us in this Chamber did not face as children. Many of us were fortunate to be brought up in very stable, loving homes, where many of the things that our young people today are being exposed to were unimaginable. Yet, now, unfortunately, our children are being exposed to things that no 16-year-old should ever experience.

We also have to accept that, unfortunately, while we are dealing today with abuse in institutions controlled by the trusts, the vast majority of abuse that goes on in Northern Ireland is going on in the home or is being committed by persons known to the victim. Therefore, while this is a very worrying situation, and there is a special need to care for those in homes who are most vulnerable, we seem to be facing an epidemic of abuse of our most vulnerable well away from the eyes of the state and the trusts. Therefore, I agree entirely with Mr Beggs when he states that we need to look much more widely at what is happening to our children.

Sadly, a large number of those who are abused do not realise that they are being abused at all. The majority are young girls who have had a desperately poor hand dealt to

them in life. They have perhaps come from broken homes and been passed from pillar to post and from one family to the other, and when they are shown some form of affection by an older man — these men do not tend to be in their 50s or 60s; they tend to be only a few years older than the girls — they latch on to it. Even though that affection can often have a terrible price in terms of abuse, and, often, the young girl is passed around for sexual services among other men, they still latch on to the fact that someone cares for them, someone is paying them attention and someone is buying them alcohol, drugs or presents for what they are doing. Therefore, you are dealing with a situation where it is very difficult to control young people leaving institutions and getting involved in things that are highly undesirable.

Now that we realise that it is happening, the Minister has been absolutely right in taking the action that he has taken. It was the Rochdale and Oxford cases that alerted the police to a succession of random events that were building up and indicating a pattern of almost systematic sexual abuse. As soon as the Minister became aware of that, action was taken.

The Safeguarding Board was established. The Committee, when I was its Chair, spent a huge amount of time ensuring that that body was strengthened in its powers and effectiveness. The Bill that set up the Safeguarding Board was improved as a result of the scrutiny of all members of the Committee. The board is up and running, and it has produced an action plan.

The Minister has announced that there will be an inquiry, which is also the right action. The honourable Member for Foyle mentioned that she felt that there was a lack of detail about that. I have no doubt that the Minister, during his summation, will provide more detail. If he does not, it is up to the Member to table any questions that she feels need to be answered so that we have more information. Given past records, I am absolutely certain that this inquiry will be open, exhaustive and extensive. We have learned our lessons from other inquiries in Northern Ireland. We now know that we need to try to make them quick and to the point, and they should report quickly. With the pseudomonas inquiry, for example, rather than going for a full-blown judicial inquiry that could last a decade — as one has — we have gone for something that gets to the point of concern more quickly. I am absolutely certain that this inquiry will be very much like that.

We need to know the facts and the truth, but we have a much more fundamental issue to address. If our society continues to break down the way that it is, we will have more and more examples of vulnerable people being abused. We need to address the core issues as to why that is happening and take action immediately.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirimse fáilte roimh an rún agus roimh an leasú chomh maith. I welcome the motion and the amendment. The recent revelations have caused widespread concern among the public about how we care for some of the most vulnerable in our society. From the media reports, it appears to many that children in care have been abandoned to deal by themselves with the abusers and sexual predators. It is essential that we restore faith in the social care system that is responsible for looking after children and young people at risk. Likewise, it is crucial that we recognise and put on the

record that many people in that social care system do valuable and good work.

It is vital that the justice system is seen to be able to deal with those responsible for abusing children and young people. I welcome the decision to direct the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to undertake a thematic review of the cases that triggered the police investigation in order to learn lessons from the management of those cases and improve future practice.

The setting up of an independent, expert-led inquiry into child exploitation here, supported by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, is also a welcome step. The Health Minister has said of the inquiry:

"The remit is wide-ranging and not confined to children in the care system ... the recommendations will be wider reaching than justice and health and social care."

Let us hope so, because it is clear that there has been a massive failure in some areas of social care and policing. There are any number of unanswered questions to be addressed by the review and inquiry. Why did the police decide to review those cases in the first place? Having done so, what mistakes were found to have been made in the initial investigations? What interventions did social services attempt in those cases? Who was responsible for the decisions being taken? We have all seen reports, and the problems have been highlighted previously. Why was prompt and properly coordinated action not taken to address those problems?

Of particular concern is the suggestion that the recommendations of a 2010 Health and Social Care Board report on children missing from care have not been fully implemented. It has been reported that there are:

"concerns about how much information was shared between the police and social services about young people at risk of abuse."

If that is the case, that issue also needs to be investigated fully.

We must also be mindful of the warnings from the NSPCC and the children's charity Barnardo's. The cases currently identified, involving 22 young people aged between 13 and 18, may be only the tip of the iceberg.

We have a responsibility to investigate what went wrong and do everything we can to prevent that situation recurring. However, there is also a need to ensure that attention and resources are not diverted from the crucial task of protecting children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, and keeping them safe, here and now.

I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion. I have to concur with the comments of the Deputy Chair, Jim Wells, who said that this was perhaps one of the most important and distressing debates that we have had in the Assembly during this mandate.

What we have heard recently is totally and absolutely obnoxious, shocking and horrendous and a real let-down and failure of our young people. Though the words of the motion may have been somewhat overtaken by events, the debate remains highly relevant, and I am grateful to

Maeve McLaughlin, the Chair of the Committee, and her colleagues for bringing it to the Floor.

Everyone must join in expressing alarm at the sexual exploitation of children and young people and how it has been allowed to continue for so long. It is particularly sad when the young people are vulnerable or have suffered abuse.

Although the focus has primarily and originally fallen on young people who live in care homes or in other care settings, others have stressed that young people are at risk in a wide range of settings. Coercion can be obvious, but it can often be very subtle, so exploitation can come in many forms and may not be readily apparent to the victim, either at the time or even with the benefit of hindsight. Also, the nature of coercion or enticement can quickly change, and it is in this regard that we should be mindful of the particular dangers that can come from the internet and via social media.

The current efforts of the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister to coordinate the policy and actions of various Departments on the dangers of the internet and the protection of young people take on particular importance. No doubt, there have been systemic failings, but, in acknowledging that, we should also acknowledge the very committed and professional role played by many care staff, including social workers, in our social services and care system.

I welcome the statement by the Minister of Health and Social Services on setting up an independent inquiry in conjunction with others, including the Minister of Justice. This is a multifaceted problem, and addressing it will involve a range of inputs and responses from a number of Departments and agencies. However, it is right and appropriate that the Department of Health and Social Services takes the lead. A number of key questions must be asked and fully explored. It is not immediately clear whether all those issues are explicitly covered in the terms of reference of the inquiry announced by the Minister last week, but I presume that they will be addressed.

We need to understand how we ended up in this situation. My understanding is that relatively recent police investigations lifted the lid on a situation that is, potentially, much more widespread. Why did systems not flag up problems much earlier? Were previous attempts to highlight problems spurned or downplayed? What evidence is there of learning from the risks becoming apparent in other jurisdictions? Those are questions that should be answered. What lessons have already been learned and applied from the Barnardo's report and other similar initiatives?

1.30 pm

I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this can be a speedy and efficient inquiry, given the urgency of getting it right. The key first step is to properly understand the nature and scale of the problem. Once the recommendations have been made, it will be incumbent upon government to work proactively and collectively to ensure that they are properly implemented without delay. I know that my colleague the Justice Minister and the agencies of the criminal justice system will be very committed to playing their part in supporting the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and others in that regard. Such is the

urgency of the matter, I urge any of the relevant agencies to introduce new policies and procedures —

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

Mr McCarthy: — on an interim or provisional basis, as soon as possible. The Alliance Party gives its support to the motion and the amendment.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): This is a very important issue. That is why I called a special meeting of the Justice and Health Committees when the news broke. Within 48 hours, we had the two Ministers sitting in front of the Committee and were holding them to account and asking questions about how this could have happened. I put on record my appreciation for them enabling us to do that.

What has disappointed me so far in this debate is that, to date, not one Member who has spoken has mentioned where the blame for this rests, which is on the perpetrators who carried out this most horrendous crime against the vulnerable individuals who are now the victims. I welcome the debate in the Assembly, but the proposer of the motion spent 10 minutes talking and did not mention the perpetrators. She spent 10 minutes saying that the focus needs to be on holding people to account and on an investigation of what went wrong in the past. I agree with that; it is right that we do those things. However, like the proposer of the amendment, I think that it is important that we focus on what we are doing today and now to protect people, children who are vulnerable in care and those across society. I say that because I am listening to the charities and those organisations that have said that the blame game is counterproductive. I could easily call for the resignation of the Justice Minister or the Chief Constable. If I so wanted to grab a cheap headline, I could do that. I do not believe that that would be beneficial, because we need the organisations to work collectively. The charities rightly say that engaging in the blame game could lead to people retrenching into the silos, which is where the system failed in the past, and they say that they are now working more closely together. If we go back to trying to pin this on some individual, we are in danger of losing the practice that exists, which is better than what it was. Did it fail in the past? Yes, it did.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Thank you for taking an intervention. Does the Member agree with organisations such as the Children's Law Centre and other children's groups, which, in effect, say that we need a fully accountable, robust, transparent and independent inquiry in order to deal with what went on previously and to put in place safeguards for children today and from here on in?

Mr Givan: The Minister has been doing that. What disappoints me is the one-upmanship that Sinn Féin seems to be engaging in on this issue. From the start, when the Minister said that we needed to have a review, Sinn Féin sought to up it and said that we needed to have an inquiry; when the Minister said that we were going to have an expert-led, independent inquiry, Sinn Féin said, "How can we try to get another one over on the Minister?" From day one, the Minister has been to the fore in saying that we need to learn the lessons of what went wrong, that we need to ensure that what is happening now is best practice and that, where there have been failings, we need to be sure to redress them.

Since this Minister took up office, it has been a very proactive Minister who has been in charge. The Member who proposed the motion rightly highlighted the 2006 child protection inspection report, because it does go beyond Barnardo's. It was the DUP's Michelle McIlveen who picked that up and asked the questions to the then Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, and who then brought forward a private Member's Bill. When Miss McIlveen was being put under pressure, the Minister, in response, told her that the approach being put forward by the consultation ran a very real risk of stigmatising children in care, particularly those who lived in residential children's homes. The Department briefed against Michelle McIlveen at that time, when she was the one, out of everybody in the Chamber, who was leading in trying to address the problem.

If, at that time, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety had been listening rather than trying to brief against people, vulnerable young people who were let down might have been protected. There are lessons that we need to learn from the mistakes that were clearly made.

The police have accepted that they failed to join all the dots. I cannot understand how we could have had that systemic failure in the police and that they looked at individual cases on their own without taking a more global approach. Should they be held to account for that? Yes, they should. I trust that the Policing Board will do that, because the Committee for Justice has already had the Chief Constable in front of it to answer questions.

However, we then asked about the resources that are going into the police now to deal with the investigation to protect children. Requests have been made for more detectives, and I trust that the Chief Constable will answer in the affirmative and provide those to the police, because they have requested them.

Roy Beggs rightly moved an amendment that all children need to be protected, and I agree with that. Early intervention is the key. Mr Beggs mentioned education, and I trust that the education authorities will step up. So far, the Department of Education has failed miserably when it comes to trying to protect vulnerable children. The Member for South Down shakes her head, yet —

Ms Ruane: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr Givan: No, I will not.

Ms Ruane: The Member is afraid to hear the truth here. He is protecting his Minister, and he is afraid to hear the truth.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume her seat. It is clear that the Member is not taking an intervention. All other Members should remain quiet.

Mr Givan: I trust that I will get an extra 20 seconds because the clock did not stop.

The Member for South Down shakes her head, yet it was on her watch that the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch for children with the most severe speech problems was closed down. She closed it down, and she should be ashamed for those vulnerable children. When the Shankill Road and Falls Road initiative to deal with vulnerable children who are truant from school was brought to the attention of the Department of Education, it walked away, and it was the Health Minister, Edwin Poots, who had to step in to try to protect those children on the Falls Road.

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

Mr Givan: Let us get all the Departments that are engaged in this around the table, making sure that we are acting collectively to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

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

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment, and I will try to stick to the subject. In response to the previous contributor, this is not about one-upmanship but about the protection of children. We should all be very clear on that. This is not about scoring points but about dealing with an extremely serious and emotional subject.

There is an old cliché that is true, which is that the measure of any civilised society is how well it looks after its young people and its older people. Unfortunately, we appear not to be doing too well with either group, taking into account the issues around residential care and now this terrible business of child sexual exploitation involving children in care.

The Barnardo's report, 'Not a World Away', was published in 2011. It contains some horrifying examples of what can happen to young people who are used for the purposes of child sexual exploitation. Many young people will not see themselves as victims and will therefore not want to be rescued from their abuser. There is an onus on professionals to consider the young people's views in the light of the wider context of personal and structural vulnerability.

It is accepted that many young people who have been sexually exploited can, as a result of their chaotic background and experiences of abuse, be difficult to work with and resistant to social work support. They can be abusive to workers and refuse to engage. It is therefore important that such behaviours are not misinterpreted as a young person not being in need or deserving of support.

Young people in care are not the only ones affected by the issue. It also applies to many other young people who are not in the care population. Some of those young people potentially have less support than children who are in care because of their family background, and so on. As my colleague Maeve McLaughlin stated, this issue came to light now because the PSNI initiated an internal review of missing persons, which led to the discovery of those cases.

The Minister announced separately that he had directed the Safeguarding Board:

"to undertake a thematic review of the cases that triggered the investigation in order to identify the learning from the management of those cases to inform and improve future practice."

The statement that was released by the Safeguarding Board, however, states that the direction from the Minister is:

"to conduct a thematic review into the recent cases".

There is some uncertainty as to what exactly the Safeguarding Board has been directed to do by the Minister. I am sure that he will clarify that particular issue.

As has been stated, the inquiry that is to be set up must be fully independent and equipped with all the necessary resources and powers. It must certainly look at the

systems failures that have allowed the sexual exploitation to continue.

The Safeguarding Board also has an important part to play in this. However, where the inquiry is concerned, it may not be perceived to be wholly independent.

This whole issue of child sexual exploitation is a blight on our society. It must be dealt with in such a way that means that it ceases to continue. It is incumbent on the Minister to ensure that that happens.

Mr Dunne: As a member of the Health Committee, I also welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important and timely matter. The protection of our children and young people must always be to the fore, and we must ensure that the exploitation of young people is brought to an end.

The recent findings are shocking. They create fear in us all, and we must take all appropriate action to prevent any further exploitation of our children and young people, whether they are in care homes or living at home in our communities.

I welcome the recent measures that the Health Minister, Edwin Poots, undertook. I commend him for taking swift action in announcing an independent expert-led inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. That is an important measure that is correctly involving the Minister of Justice. It is right and proper that any review of policy addresses the current issues and the concerns about the protection of our children in care.

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland is an important body, and it certainly has played a useful role in safeguarding children and young people. The board quite rightly works to protect the most vulnerable by working in partnership with a wide range of agencies and organisations that work with young people. The only way to really combat this problem is to work in partnership. That should be the theme right from the top of the Executive, involving all Departments, right down to a grass-roots community level.

The PSNI also has a vital role to play in helping to bring those responsible to justice. It is essential that the perpetrators of any crime, not least sexual exploitation, are prosecuted to the full rigours of the law. I welcome the PSNI's investigations into this matter, and I trust that those investigations will help the victims and reduce the risk of further attacks or exploitation.

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Given that there is no specific offence of child exploitation, if, when this piece of work is completed, it is suggested that new legislation is required to empower workers in residential homes and to prosecute those who carry out this offence, does the Member agree with me that the Justice Minister should bring it forward?

Mr Dunne: Yes. I commend the Member for his point. It is well made, and no doubt the Assembly would consider it and be supportive of it.

Any inquiry must be wide reaching and look right across society. The missing persons register, which the PSNI manages, requires improvements. Agencies tend to report missing persons to the PSNI and, therefore, feel that the responsibility for many of those young people is then transferred to the PSNI. However, we keep being told that

the PSNI does not have the resources or the expertise to manage the risks of those involved.

Social media has become another factor and another way for young people to be more open to potential exploitation by evil sexual predators. I feel that more could be done to warn children and young people in care, in their homes and in our communities about the very real dangers of social media. Unfortunately, it is far too easy for false accounts to be set up that could lure vulnerable young people and children into a false sense of security that means that they could end up meeting with a total stranger whom they have never met and know nothing about. I believe that the relatively new risks of social media have created real dangers and the potential for the exploitation of our young people at all levels of society.

This is a very important issue, and we must do all that we can to tackle the problem and put the welfare of our children and young people to the forefront. I support the motion and commend the Minister for his actions to date. I trust that work will continue to resolve this terrible problem.

1.45 pm

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the debate on the motion. I will be supporting the motion and the amendment.

It would be valuable if colleagues were not to exploit the debate in partisan political terms, as doing so would be unhelpful. It would be useful to quote the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, who said last week:

"The immediate priority must be the children and young people who have been affected or are at risk of exploitation. They must be given the protection and support that they deserve so they are safe. While important, any reviews and lessons are a second priority. Any organisation releasing information or reporting on this must do it sensitively. The welfare of these young people must be at the forefront of their minds so as not to cause any further risk or distress. The victim must not be further victimised."

That is a salutary statement from the commissioner, and we should bear that in mind. We are trying to protect children; we are not engaged in a witch-hunt. We certainly want to find out the truth of what happened, and that is very important. Neither should there be adverse comments about the professionalism of those who work in very difficult circumstances and carry out a very important role in our society. We should support them as well.

It is disturbing that 22 children have been targeted in this way. It is disturbing that there are at least 50 suspects in this sexual exploitation of children, and there could well be more. This could be the tip of the iceberg, although I hope not. I hope that the investigations that will be carried out will be done so exhaustively, so that we have an accurate and truthful picture of what happened. That is absolutely essential.

During the joint Justice and Health Committee meeting, I was a little bit disturbed by some of the evidence, which related to children who were missing from care homes at least 137 times over about 18 months. It seemed to me that although procedures were in place for the monitoring and safeguarding of those children, if those children had been in an ordinary home — as we all have — they would

probably not have gone missing. Parental authority would have been there to guide and protect the children and to keep them from leaving home. The Minister and the police emphasised the fact that care homes are not prisons, and that children should not be locked up. However, some balance has to be struck to safeguard the child so that there is not complete freedom to do whatever they want and, therefore, expose that vulnerable child to even more vulnerability. When the experts look at this situation, we will have to revisit the procedures in relation to children leaving the safety of a care home and going elsewhere. That is important.

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

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the Minister's announcement of an inquiry along with the Department of Justice. That is a valuable step.

Mr McCallister: There are few issues that stir the emotions as when we talk about children and young people, in this case vulnerable children and young people, and the exploitation that has been happening. We sometimes like to think of ourselves as a family orientated and family friendly society. That this happened and continues to happen in our society is a cause of huge concern.

I agree with colleagues who spoke of the need to do more. Most contributions, including that of Mr Maginness, were very much about where we go from here to ensure that this does not happen again, and how we can do our utmost to protect people, making sure that we are not doing so in a witch hunt. However, if there is evidence and people are brought before the courts, we will want to see prosecutions and people held accountable before the law. It is important that we do that in the context of how we prevent this in future. What roles do we need to undertake? What changes do we need to make? What choices do the Assembly and Ministers need to make?

I served on the Health Committee for nearly six years. One piece of legislation, before I left the Committee, related to setting up the Safeguarding Board. This is now a challenge to the board to make its mark on how it lifts the protections for our children and young people to a new level. There is no question of anything but unanimous support for the motion and amendment on such an important issue.

I have a couple of concerns, which I mention only as concerns on this occasion. The Assembly talked about resources being put into this. We are spending huge amounts of police time, money and resources to police a society that is divided by protests and parades, and counter-parades and protests. Whatever side of the argument you are on, whatever protest, society cannot continue to fund that sort of activity and still expect the Police Service to meet all the other needs, whether it is in child abuse, rural crime or community policing. Resources are limited. You have only to listen to Deputy Chief Constable Judith Gillespie, who said that we cannot continue to use resources on those areas and expect the police to be able to carry out their other functions.

I agree with Alban Maginness about the need to have children in proper family homes. That is why I still have a huge concern about why we have sat for four years and not progressed an adoption Bill. With one single issue, and I do not need to highlight what that issue is, we have,

effectively, held up that adoption Bill and the change that it could make to children's and young people's lives.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. With regard to the issue that he has raised, there is an analogy by way of children at school. If a child is at school and he or she leaves school and plays truant, the school has a responsibility and does everything it can to get the child back. I think that it is necessary for us to focus on that type of analogy in order to improve procedures with regard to children in care homes.

Mr McCallister: I agree with Alban Maginness's point: we do need to do that. I will happily commend the efforts that Michelle McIlveen has made with regard to children going missing from the care system. However, at present, we do not seem to have the procedures that the Member, quite rightly, highlights. We need to get to that point. When someone is in the care system, that person is already in a vulnerable, difficult place in his or her life, never mind when he or she falls out of the system. No one seems to be following that up. It is an important point.

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

Mr McCallister: I am content to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the Minister will respond.

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFMDFM Crisis

1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the crisis within OFMDFM, which the deputy First Minister's party has spoken of in the media. (AQT 121/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): I have been interviewed several times since coming back from the United States, and I have outlined my view that there are quite severe difficulties in relation to the events of recent times, not least the events over the past year, which has seen violence on the streets perpetrated, in the main, by elements within loyalism. I am on the public record as saying that it is my view that the activities of elements of the Orange Order, the PUP and the UVF in north Belfast are indistinguishable. I certainly think that that represents a real challenge to these institutions.

It is not the first time that these institutions have been challenged. There have been the killings of two soldiers in Antrim, Constables Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr, and prison officer David Black. I made some of the most forthright statements ever made by any republican leader in condemnation of those activities, effectively standing up against those who would try to plunge us back to the past.

So, I do think that serious questions have to be asked about the response of unionist leaders to the activities on the streets, particularly the incident in which 56 police officers were injured in a full-scale riot in Belfast city centre. I find that very, very disturbing. I find it particularly disturbing in the context of what appears to be a common view of many within unionism that members of the UVF, particularly in east Belfast, are up to their necks in criminality and violence.

I am particularly disturbed by the shooting of 24-year-old Jemma McGrath just a few days ago. I think that all of you know what I am talking about and that all of you know the allegations that are flying around the place — right, left and centre. I ask the question: if republicans were involved in that sort of activity, would we have the same silence that we have had from some Benches in the Assembly?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr M McGuinness: The other aspect is the decision to pull the plug on the peace-building and conflict resolution centre, which I think is directly related to some of the activities that are happening on the street, and that deeply saddens me.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. He seems to cast all the blame on one side, but many would see this as simply competitive posturing

between Sinn Féin and the DUP, which really does no favours whatsoever for Northern Ireland or the Assembly.

Mr M McGuinness: I am not one who is inclined to posture. In fact, I think that I have made my particular contribution towards the stability of these institutions through some of the most testing and difficult times that they have seen. In reality, for me, it is about the commitment of all of us to stand by the agreements that we have made and to face down violent extremists, whether they be so-called dissident republicans or extreme loyalists. That is the test for the Assembly and the Executive. I think that, thus far, serious questions have to be asked about the commitment to stand by the PSNI, particularly in the context of the PSNI Chief Constable's comments today about his dismay at the failure of politics to support the police.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

2. **Mr Maskey** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to give an update on the developments at the Maze/Long Kesh site, given the recent withdrawal of support for the peace-building and reconciliation centre by the DUP. (AQT 122/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: As everybody knows, the peace-building and conflict resolution centre is a Programme for Government commitment, and we have received a letter of offer of £18 million from the European Union to complete the project. The withdrawal of support by our partners in government is deeply disappointing. The combined efforts of the Ulster Unionist Party, supported by extreme loyalists, in mounting a campaign against the peace-building and conflict resolution centre were deplorable.

The inability to honour a Programme for Government commitment has created very significant difficulties for me as deputy First Minister. I always wanted the peace-building and conflict resolution centre to be a shrine to peace and a symbol of a new future that opened up space for dialogue and true reconciliation between our people. It was the jewel in the crown of the Maze/Long Kesh (MLK) site and would, undoubtedly, be a tourist Mecca. The EU had earmarked the site as its centre of excellence for conflict resolution and peace-building activities, and it saddens me that agreements have not been honoured and that extremes of unionism have shifted the direction of the DUP. In that context, it is essential that we find remedies to the problem that we face. We have to find a way to honour the agreements made, and I am also conscious that the peace-building and conflict resolution centre is part of a wider agreement.

The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) moved on to that site last year and had a very successful show, and I intend to honour its courageous lead in recognising the incredible potential of the site. In September last year, we set up the MLK development corporation to oversee investment on the site. So the decision to withdraw support for constructing the peace-building and conflict resolution centre as agreed has jeopardised the future of the site as a whole. I am very content that the RUAS continues next year on the same basis as this year. However, the anticipated development of the site can proceed only on the basis of the honouring of the commitments made. The role of the development corporation and the board —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Minister, you have to adhere to the two-minute rule.

Mr M McGuinness: — has been undermined and called into question, and no further —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Alex Maskey for a supplementary question.

Mr M McGuinness: No further development will take place until this is satisfactorily resolved.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: If we obey Standing Orders and the Business Committee's guidance, we will give as many people as possible an opportunity to contribute. Ministers have two minutes to respond, and supplementaries have to be questions — the previous one was not.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his very frank response. Will he clarify what he means by the issue being "satisfactorily resolved"?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said in my initial answer, there is a very clear commitment in the Programme for Government to build the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. Daniel Libeskind, a world-renowned architect, has been over here on countless occasions working with the people who had the responsibility to put the design in place. Daniel Libeskind has experience of difficulties with some of his buildings, particularly the construction of the new Jewish memorial museum in Berlin. From my perspective, and recognising the importance of the site strategically for employment prospects and the fact that it represents probably the prime area of potential real estate in the whole of western Europe, there is a huge responsibility on all of us to ensure that the initial commitments are honoured and that the peace-building and conflict resolution centre is built on that site for the benefit of all our people.

Undocumented Irish

3. **Mr Rogers** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations the deputy First Minister has made to senior American figures on behalf of the undocumented, given that in answer to my question last week, the First Minister said that it was really up to the Irish Government to look after Irish passport holders, even though, as we all know, many people in the North exercise dual citizenship and the undocumented are from both communities. (AQT 123/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: This is an issue that has exercised SDLP and Sinn Féin Members in particular, given that many of them are being lobbied consistently by families who, on occasions, have very difficult circumstances as a result of the inability of undocumented people to travel back home for things such as funerals, weddings, baptisms and so forth; even for all-Ireland hurling and Gaelic football finals, which are close to the heart of many in Irish America.

Every time that I go to the United States, I contribute to that debate. I speak to people on Capitol Hill, and I am encouraged by the recent decision by the Senate to effectively propel the debate forward to the House of Representatives. I hope that the outcome of that will be to deal satisfactorily with the plight of many of the undocumented. Quite clearly, they come from right across

the community, and we have a duty and responsibility to try to alleviate hardship, wherever it exists, particularly in the context of how it affects our own people.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Minister. I also welcome the bipartisan approach of the Republicans and Democrats in America. Can the Minister assure me that he will make representations at the highest level in the House of Representatives to ensure that this is brought to a vote as soon as possible?

Mr M McGuinness: It has been raised consistently and will continue to be raised. All of us are conscious that, when we talk about the undocumented Irish, the resolution of that issue is not just about how you resolve the difficulties relating to the island of Ireland, North or South. This is about many millions more people from different ethnic groups, particularly from Central America and South America. So, it is a huge issue, and I certainly hope that the deliberations taking place at the minute on Capitol Hill can lead to a resolution of the difficulties presented for people.

On my last visit to the United States, I ran, accidentally, into a man who had been undocumented for the past 12 years. He employs 100 people in the United States of America. That is the scale of what we are dealing with. These people are contributing to society and to providing employment for many others in society. There is a desperate need to resolve their plight as quickly as possible.

Warrington

4. Mr Allister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the deputy First Minister's recent visit to Warrington, whether, apart from pious platitudes, the deputy First Minister has, at any time, from his inside knowledge gained through his position of leadership in the republican movement, done anything to help the police to catch the child killers of Warrington, the Birmingham bombers or, indeed, the perpetrators of any other crime such as that. (AQT 124/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: I was pleased and delighted to go to Warrington, at the invitation of Colin and Wendy Parry — two people who I have known for the past 10 or 11 years; people who have made an enormous contribution to the peace process. I think that they have been asked questions similar to those posed to me today. They have answered them in their own way, particularly stressing, on every occasion, that all they want to do is to contribute to the ongoing success of the peace process.

I do not have any personal knowledge whatsoever about the individuals who were involved in either the events in Warrington or Birmingham. That obviously brings us into a big debate about how we deal with the past. Of course, that responsibility has been given now to Richard Haass, who will deliberate on these matters in conjunction with the panel of parties over the course of the next couple of months, and I hope that there will be a resolution to that.

It is quite a regular occurrence for the Member to portray himself as a paragon of virtue and say that he is anti-conflict and anti-violence, so it was interesting to see him standing with leading members of the UVF at a recent demonstration in north Belfast. He was not in the least shamefaced about it.

2.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends topical questions. We now move on to OFMDFM questions for oral answer.

Delivering Social Change

1. Mr Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the projects being taken forward as part of the signature programmes under Delivering Social Change. (AQO 4645/11-15)

8. Mr Irwin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the signature programmes under Delivering Social Change. (AQO 4652/11-15)

12. Mr Rogers asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the six signature programmes under Delivering Social Change, announced in October 2012. (AQO 4656/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1, 8 and 12 together.

Work on the implementation of the six Delivering Social Change signature programmes that were announced by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on 10 October 2012 is progressing well. The Department of Education is leading on the signature programme to improve literacy and numeracy levels in both primary and post-primary schools. It expects to have concluded the recruitment of all teachers by the end of October. They will deliver tuition to children in 267 primary and post-primary schools to assist them in achieving higher grades.

The family support hubs programme will see 16 existing family support hubs receive continued support and 10 new family support hubs established. It is anticipated that all 10 new hubs will be online by April 2014; indeed, three are already operating in the Northern Trust area.

On the support for parents signature programme, a suite of programmes has been developed, and, through those programmes, guidance, training and information will be provided for up to 1,200 families. By way of the social enterprise hub programme, 11 hubs will be established in what are currently vacant commercial premises and will offer a range of business advice and practical support to social enterprise entrepreneurs.

Good progress has been made, and all hubs are due to be established by January 2014. In line with the objectives of the nurture units signature programme, 20 teachers and 20 classroom assistants have been recruited. The nurture units are now in place for the 2013-14 academic year. It is anticipated that 480 children and their families will benefit from the units.

The sixth and final signature programme will see the scaling up and rolling out of a pilot intervention to support young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and their families. From October, the pilot intervention that targeted 44 families in urban and rural areas is being replicated to reach up to 720 disadvantaged

families. Further details on specific aspects of each of the signature programmes should be sought directly from the lead Departments.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr William Irwin. Sorry, I call Mr Beggs. I beg your pardon.

Mr Beggs: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the junior Minister for her response, but the family support hubs were announced over a year ago. Why has it taken so long to bring that additional support to families and why will it take a further year to have them all on the ground?

Ms J McCann: As the Member said, the hubs were announced last year, but work has been ongoing. First, we had to work together to find out where the families that needed to utilise the hubs were, and then we had to see where the hubs would be put. Some are virtual and some are hubs in themselves, so work had to be done on that. We wanted to ensure that the families who needed the support and the services were the ones receiving them, so we had to be careful in how the programme was rolled out.

Mr Irwin: I understand that the leases for the majority of hubs will be signed in October. Can the junior Minister confirm that?

Ms J McCann: I can, and I said that in my answer. There are already three hubs up and running at the moment, while 10 new hubs will be online by April 2014. The three that are already running are in the Northern Trust area, and a suite of programmes has been developed whereby the parenting programmes will happen in those hubs as well.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Sean Rogers. Moving on, I call John Dallat.

Mr Dallat: Given the delay in getting that all off the ground, is it premature of me to ask whether the Department has developed any further programmes and initiatives as highlighted in the children and young persons' early action paper?

Ms J McCann: The early actions paper that you mention identifies the needs of children and families specifically. There is a Programme for Government commitment to deliver a range of measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Delivering Social Change is the framework that we hope to do that in. There is also the 10-year strategy. Obviously, Delivering Social Change is about trying to unify all that. Although it is a framework, we are trying to put a focus on specific departmental spending. We have identified some of the other future programmes from the early actions paper. In due course, I will let the Member know where that is going as well.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the junior Minister for her answers. Will she tell us how much of the £26 million that was allocated for that purpose has been spent to date on the projects that she mentioned?

Ms J McCann: I cannot give you the exact spending, but a number of projects were to be rolled out under that £26 million. One was tuition with the Education Department and another was the hubs that I just mentioned with the health and parenting programmes. Another was the social economy hubs, and the last was pathways to employment. Some money has been spent on scoping out where those particular services will be put. I do not have the exact figure, but I will get it for the Member. The work has

progressed, particularly on the education side of it, in that the teachers will be in place in this academic year for those young children who need that help and tuition for better educational attainment.

Accountability Mechanisms

2. **Mr Attwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the need for robust accountability mechanisms in order to address the past. (AQO 4646/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: We all recognise the need for a robust mechanism for addressing the past. A panel of parties, chaired by Dr Richard Haass, has now begun its work to consider parades and protests, flags and emblems, and the past. The panel is expected to conclude its work by December. I think that we are all agreed that, although these are all difficult issues, dealing with the past will present the greatest challenges. There is also work going on in the victims' forum, whereby a working group is looking at that very issue. Those are victims from a diverse range of backgrounds who are examining their shared experience of dealing with and acknowledging the past. The group will advise the Victims' Commissioner, who will then present us, as Ministers, with her findings. I look forward to receiving that advice, which we will consider in advancing our work in that area.

The work of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), while falling under the remit of the Minister of Justice, is also an issue of interest and importance to us all. We have a role to play in ensuring that any concerns about its operation and remit are resolved. In that respect, it is important that any organisation dealing with the issue, including the HET, is credible and effective. It must also be viewed as impartial, and it must have the public's full confidence.

Mr Attwood: When, in topical questions, the deputy First Minister referred to a commitment of all of us to what had been agreed, I think that many of us were thinking of the family of Columba McVeigh, which today said that people still have information on his whereabouts but are not forthcoming. Does the deputy First Minister agree that the essential architecture of the Eames/Bradley group offers a comprehensive way forward to address the past? Does he believe that, as part of that, those who were in command and control of and directed state organisations and terror groups and who are responsible for the horror of the past 40 years should be held personally to account?

Mr M McGuinness: I, too, have tremendous sympathy for the McVeigh family in their efforts to recover Columba's body. I have met the McVeighs on a number of occasions over recent years. Every Member will know that Gerry Adams in particular has been very proactive, resulting in the recovery of a number of bodies through information provided. That work has to continue, and I appeal to everybody who has any scrap of information about any of the remaining cases that need to be resolved to bring that forward.

No doubt, there were many laudable suggestions from what Bishop Eames and Denis Bradley proffered for all of us. Of course, we know that there was significant opposition among some political parties to Eames/Bradley. All of this will be considered very seriously in the context of the Haass talks and, no doubt, all the parties in this House will have their opportunity to contribute to that.

Recovering the truth about the past is very important, not only from those who were involved in military organisations but from those who were in positions of political leadership who gave wholehearted support to military organisations. Indeed, some of those people were in government.

Mr Allister: What about those in the army council? What about them?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. Does the deputy First Minister agree with the views of people who say that dealing with the past is too difficult and that the Haass talks will not find a solution?

Mr M McGuinness: We all know that dealing with the past is an incredibly difficult issue, and I do not accept that the Haass talks cannot find a solution. However, if we are to find a solution, there has to be a generosity of spirit. Our past is contested because of different experiences, and, when I hear phrases such as, "We will not allow a rewriting of history", it immediately makes me think that someone has decided that they own the past and that they are seeking to enforce their view of it on the rest of us. That approach will not work. Of course, recently, at the annual peace lecture in Warrington, I made it clear that the past cannot be undone and that we all have to recognise our role in the conflict.

The challenge for all of us is to ensure that there can never be a repeat of what went before. Despite all our difficulties, dialogue and not coercion are at the centre of our relationships on these islands. I approach the Haass talks as I approach everything else in my political life, and that is with the belief that resolutions of these difficult issues are doable and that it is workable. I absolutely do believe that, if there is goodwill from all the participants, a solution can be found.

Mr Campbell: Most people view the Haass team's examination of the past as its most difficult assignment, but will the deputy First Minister take this opportunity to expand further than he did when he was on the stand at the Saville inquiry, when he pleaded the fifth amendment regarding declaring and opening up about his grim and grisly past?

Mr M McGuinness: That is not the first time that I have heard that question posed. I remind the Member and everybody else in this House that I sat in the witness box for two days at the Saville tribunal in Derry's Guildhall and allowed myself to be questioned. I answered honestly all the questions that I was asked. What is most significant about the outcome of the Saville tribunal is that Saville accepted every single thing that I said as the truth in finding against the Parachute Regiment and the British Army. Saville accepted not only every single thing that I said but that which other young men like me who were involved in the IRA in the city at that time said. That totally undermines what you just said.

Mr Nesbitt: During the deputy First Minister's evidence to Saville, there were questions that he told Lord Saville that he would not answer "under any circumstances". Is that still the case? How does he expect us to get to the truth when there are people who hold the truth but will not reveal it under any circumstances?

2.30 pm

Mr M McGuinness: I remind the Member again that the Saville tribunal was a very lengthy and hugely significant tribunal. It was probably the longest in legal history. The outcome of the tribunal, as identified by Lord Saville and his colleagues in their judgement, found totally and absolutely against the Parachute Regiment — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: And, in the course of outlining his judgement, he totally and absolutely exonerated the IRA in Derry from any involvement whatsoever in the events of Bloody Sunday. *[Interruption.]* I know that you and others find that hard to accept.

Child Poverty

3. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what additional measures they intend to bring forward to fight child poverty. (AQO 4647/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, junior Minister McCann will answer this question.

Ms J McCann: The work taken forward under the Delivering Social Change framework, as I mentioned earlier, focuses on the needs of children and families. The Member will know that child poverty cannot be seen in isolation as just affecting the child; the family has to be taken into consideration as well. To ensure that the most urgent and significant problems in our society are addressed, including deprivation, social exclusion and disadvantage, the six signature programmes that I mentioned earlier will contribute to the delivery of the child poverty strategy. We are keen that further programmes are identified as part of a rolling programme of initiatives.

We are currently considering a range of possible future signature programmes for a second phase of the work to be taken forward. That may include the development of further interventions to specifically tackle child poverty. Our Department has also commissioned work by the National Children's Bureau to develop a child poverty outcomes model to help better understand the role of each Department in addressing child poverty. The National Children's Bureau is assisting Departments to establish a cross-governmental approach in which every Department would understand its role in reducing child poverty and make an effective contribution to improving outcomes.

The model, based on the key principles of outcomes-based accountability, is designed to allow assessment of which interventions are likely to produce the best outcomes over the long term and assess the impact of mainstream programmes already in place. The model, which has a track record of delivering improvements in outcomes, will be published shortly. The work on the outcomes model will also help to address and inform the third annual report on the delivery of the child poverty strategy, which is scheduled to be laid before the Assembly on March 2014.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 required the Executive to publish a child poverty strategy and measure how departmental actions impact on the numbers of children living in poverty. The Act details four statutory measures against which progress has to be measured and reported

on annually. The overall target is the eradication of child poverty by 2020. We are pleased with the progress made and look forward to further progress in line with our commitments in the Programme for Government.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the junior Minister for her response. Does she not agree that what is most worrying in recent reports is the persistent level of poverty among families and children, as she pointed out? What specific, direct measures is the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister going to take to make a difference in those areas where there is the long-term poverty that we all know exists in all of our communities?

Ms J McCann: The Member makes a valid point. Research has shown that there is persistent poverty in particular families. The 'Children and Young Persons Early Action Document' identified where we need to focus on tackling that "generational poverty", which is another term for it. Some of the added measures we are taking — for instance, the child poverty outcomes model that I mentioned — will look at the outcomes instead of just measuring against outputs, which is what normally would have happened. I think that we can see, tangibly, the difference we are making as we go along.

Last week, junior Minister Bell and I launched the Bright Start, part of the framework of the childcare strategy. Within that there are a number of measures looking particularly at rural childcare, childcare for children with disabilities and creating new childcare places in areas of disadvantage and need. That all adds to new measures that were taken to try to actually deal with child poverty.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the publication of the Executive framework for childcare. How concerned is the junior Minister that an early years organisation in Northern Ireland has assessed that childcare provision is as much as 10 years behind European standards?

Ms J McCann: We had a long consultation process when we first went out with the framework document. The gaps that we identified were for school-age children between the ages of four and 14, children with disabilities and rural childcare. So, we did have quite a lengthy consultation around that. There are 15 key actions in the childcare strategy that we are looking to put in place. Over the next 12 months, we hope to review the performance on those 15 actions, because, while you say that we may be behind in our delivery on childcare, we are very keen to get it right this time. We are trying to create new childcare places where they are needed, and, as we go on, we will try to measure and evaluate, as I said earlier, the outcomes of that as opposed to the outputs.

Mr Copeland: I thank the junior Minister for her answers so far on this important subject. Will she detail what investigations have been carried out by the deputy First Minister's Department to assess the impact on child poverty potentially arising from the Minister for Social Development's proposals to reform the welfare system?

Ms J McCann: The Member will be aware that there is deep concern that child poverty is on the rise and that the proposed welfare reforms — I know that you are a member of that Committee — will make child poverty and family poverty even worse. We have been looking at that. I have met a number of organisations, including the Child Poverty Alliance and others that represent families. We are looking particularly at issues around universal benefits;

for instance, that the person getting paid those benefits would be the prime carer of the child in the household, that payments of benefits are more frequent, and the bedroom tax. Those are all going to have a knock-on effect on child poverty and family poverty in general. At the moment, those are the types of issues that we are looking at.

Mr Agnew: I concur with the previous questioner on the concerns about the impact of welfare reform. Does the junior Minister agree that in-work poverty is a significant element of child poverty? Will her office, in that regard, support a living wage in public procurement contracts at the Executive?

Ms J McCann: The short answer is yes. Public procurement is something that we have discussed in the Assembly on a number of occasions, and I know that different Members have strong views about the way that we deliver good services. In the public procurement framework, we are looking to tackle disadvantage and best serve the needs of our communities. For instance, we need to ensure that the childcare strategy, which we launched part of last week, looks at building childcare delivery mechanisms in and around the social economy sector. That means that it will employ local people and regenerate local communities, because those childcare services are very much based in the community. Certainly, procurement is one issue that we will be looking at.

New York Investment Trip

4. **Mr Buchanan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the benefits that their recent visit to the United States will bring to the local economy. (AQO 4648/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I travelled to New York city on Monday 9 September to undertake a number of engagements to promote the local business message in advance of the economic conference that will take place here on 10 and 11 October. Therefore, one of the main benefits of our visit will be increased US participation in the conference. We also had the opportunity to consolidate relationships with existing investors, who are our greatest advocates in encouraging others to follow in their footsteps.

We began our mission by meeting senior executives at Citigroup. It came here in 2004 with an original plan to create 375 jobs by 2009. The company now employs in excess of 1,200, and the Belfast facility is one of only four centres of excellence in the world. We also met Duncan Niederauer, who is CEO of the New York Stock Exchange. Like Citigroup, the New York Stock Exchange is an internationally recognised blue chip company. Both companies confirmed that they would act as advocates on our behalf at the October conference. We also met Mayor Bloomberg at City Hall, where we discussed the conference. We spent Wednesday morning travelling outside the city to meet a potential investor. On Thursday, we were guests at the World Trade Center memorial, where we met Marcus Robinson, who is a Belfast-based award-winning documentary film-maker. We also met Larry Silverstein, who is the New York real estate developer who has transformed the World Trade Center site into what it is today. We visited Brooklyn Navy Yard to meet executives at Steiner Studios to look at opportunities to promote film production here, and we attended the Wall

Street 50 event on Thursday evening, where we addressed an audience of 250 financial services executives.

In summary, the visit allowed us to extend the invitation to attend the economic conference to a wide range of business executives. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships with existing investors and to begin relationships with potential new ones. All in all, it was an extremely successful visit.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. Will he advise what steps are being taken to ensure that these benefits will be realised throughout all parts of Northern Ireland and that places such as my constituency of West Tyrone, which is a rural area, will be a beneficiary of this trip?

Mr M McGuinness: There is a huge responsibility on Invest NI, working with potential investors, to ensure that there is, as far as is practicable, foreign direct investment. However, people have to bear it in mind that large companies make their own decisions about what they think is best for them. Invest is conscious of the point that the Member has made not just in relation to his constituency, as similar appeals have come from MLAs in other constituencies. Invest NI is conscious of the arguments and is doing everything in its power to ensure as equal a distribution of jobs as possible.

This was an extremely important and successful visit, and we look forward to addressing the House in the coming months with news of new inward investments that were supported by our intervention. The duty then falls on Invest, and I am sure that it will take on board the comments that the Member for West Tyrone and other Members have made consistently over recent times.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad-Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Will the deputy First Minister elaborate on his view of the importance of American investment at this time, especially in the current economic situation?

Mr M McGuinness: It is hugely important. The First Minister and I travel regularly to the United States, and I can say without fear of contradiction that our travels there over the past couple of years, particularly at a time of world economic recession, have produced remarkable results for inward investment for our people and for jobs. We are all conscious that America remains our largest source of investment, and we have a long history of US investment. There are something like 165 US-owned companies here, and they employ in the region of 19,000 people. I am absolutely convinced that there will be more very positive announcements in the next short while. Naturally, I hope that the economic investment conference will be the success that we expect it to be.

2.45 pm

Regional Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We will start with topical questions. The first Member on the list, Mrs Dolores Kelly, has withdrawn her name, so I call Mr Michael McGimpsey.

Parking Schemes: South Belfast

2. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the long-running saga of the provision of residents' parking schemes in inner south Belfast, specifically at Stranmillis, the Markets, Sandy Row and Donegall Pass, what progress has been made to allow us to give an undertaking to those residents and communities about such a provision. (AQT 132/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

I am grateful to the Member for his question and pay tribute to him for his ongoing interest in the matter. He has taken the opportunity to meet me along with interested groups from areas around his constituency. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to implement a scheme in any of those areas, but I hope that we will continue to work to resolve outstanding issues and ensure that a scheme can be introduced. The schemes, once established in one area, have the potential to be enacted in other areas. I am aware of interest in other places where people want to see progress. I am keen that there is progress, and I know that the Member is, too.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for his answer. There seems to be some optimism there. Bear in mind that we began this about 10 years ago when John Spellar was a direct rule Minister. Roads Service appears to have fought a very valiant fight for the provision of these schemes. Conditions have deteriorated since the advent of Belfast on the Move, and parking in these areas is absolutely dire. This is critical for these communities. Given that the last consultation finished a few weeks ago, can the Minister give an assurance that we are on the cusp of getting this provision?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member and accept his frustration — it is equally frustrating for me. As he rightly says, this has been going on for years, way before my tenure as Minister. Nonetheless, I, as Minister, am keen for the schemes to advance. I will reflect again on the situation in the areas that he has referred to and see whether progress can be made at the earliest stage.

Mr Irwin: Can the Minister tell the House the cost to date of the vesting of land for the A5?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. The Member raised the issue of the A5 in topical questions last time, so it clearly remains topical for him. The answer is largely the same: approximately £60 million has been expended on the A5 project to date. As the Member well knows, the project is delayed for very well rehearsed reasons that he, the House and the Executive have heard before. However, it is delayed but not abandoned, and he will know that it is an Executive priority.

Mr Irwin: I have spoken to farmers who have lost the use of land and buildings for over a year now. Not only have they not received any compensation but no one has come near them to assess the losses incurred. Is that acceptable? When can those farmers expect payment?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. I need to challenge some of his assertions. There has been ongoing contact with landowners. Decisions have been made and agreed on whether landowners will carry out existing accommodation works in the situation in which we find ourselves. I am certainly aware that a number of landowners who had applied for up to 90%

of compensation for loss of land in the A5 scheme have received their compensation. It remains a very fluid situation and, in many ways, a challenging one, given the legal and financial difficulties. We are working our way through it, but I do not accept that Roads Service or my Department have in any way been unhelpful to resolving issues by mutual agreement with landowners in the current situation.

Street Lighting

4. Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, following a previous question of mine in relation to street lighting in residential areas to the rear of properties whether he can tell the House exactly when that policy was changed. (AQT 134/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My understanding is that that policy was changed a number of years ago. Certainly, the change predated my time, and it may even have predated devolution in this place. I understand the Member's point, but the policy is in place, and, currently, I have no plans to have it reviewed. A number of Members have written to me particularly on the issues of new lighting schemes and where old lights are being made redundant. I have sympathy for the position that many people find themselves in, but the policy is such that I am not able to show the flexibility that perhaps the Member would like me to and which I may like to show too.

Mr Clarke: Given that you are Minister and, I am sure, have the power to review any policy, are you suggesting that it is acceptable that, where street lighting is being upgraded, people are now left in fear, particularly at this time of year with winter and the dark nights drawing in? These people have, in the past, enjoyed street lighting. The Minister should consult his Department because a departmental official told me that the policy had changed only within the last number of months, and hence those street lights have been removed. Maybe it would be a better use of money than the £60 million that has been squandered on the A5 road scheme.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. As a Minister, you are not allowed simply to conjure up changes in policy without proper consultation and adherence to all the section 75 and other equality issues. I understand the Member's point. He seemed to make a reference, at the end, to the A5 project: I remind the Member that his party is fully supportive, at Executive level, of the A5 scheme.

Local Trade Initiatives

5. Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, given the difficult economic environment in which our businesses are operating, he agrees that his Department has a role to play in supporting initiatives run by local traders' associations that promote shopping locally. (AQT 135/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. Indeed, as a member of the Executive and someone in charge of a Department, I believe that every effort should be made to continue to support the local economy and traders. We all know how difficult trading has been in town and city centres. Last week, I was in the Ballyhackamore area in the Member's constituency, and I took the opportunity to speak with traders and to learn at first hand

some of the problems that they are experiencing. Most of their concerns related to the high cost of rates, which is a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Nevertheless, I take on board their concerns, and the Member knows that what I have tried to do as Minister in respect of parking was not to implement on-street car parking charges. Indeed, I have successfully argued at Executive level for a moratorium on increases in car parking charges until at least 2015.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer and his support for small businesses. Can the Minister explain the rationale that his Department used, which seemingly, targeted the honest, hard-working business owners of the Ballyhackamore traders' association, when it requested that the association remove its "Eat, Shop, Live" banners from street furniture, while allowing tattered flags, which surely distract from business opportunities, to remain on the same lamp posts?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question, but I am not sure that the Alliance Party is in a particularly strong position to criticise anybody, given the flags protest, which came about as a result of its decision at Belfast City Hall, and the problems that emerged from that. Therefore, I am afraid that I am not going to take lectures on flags from the Alliance Party.

Street furniture is an issue. There are issues of public safety that have to be adhered to, and the Member should recognise that. Some discretion and flexibility can be arrived at, and we are happy to facilitate that. I felt that I had a very productive meeting with the traders of Ballyhackamore last week. The Member was not present at that meeting, and I do not know the readout that she has got from that meeting. Nevertheless, I heard at first hand the issues that were raised, and I was encouraged. I was also encouraged to see the economic activity in Ballyhackamore.

Doran's Rock, Saintfield

6. Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the possibility of bringing forward the construction of road improvements at the A7 at Doran's Rock just outside Saintfield. (AQT 136/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. How topical it is I am not entirely sure, but it is clearly topical in Doran's Rock.

I think that I have discussed with Members, certainly in response to questions, the possibility of bringing forward a clutch of road improvement schemes that would make a significant contribution to and give a lot of relief to the travelling public in key areas. The scheme that she mentioned could fall into that.

I had discussions with the Finance Minister recently. I want to pursue those and encourage him that a line in a budget can be created whereby we can bring forward those schemes, because sometimes the big, grandiose schemes, while important, can encounter difficulties, be they legal or financial. On the ground, people would be much more impressed by the work of the Assembly and the Executive if we were able to create road improvements that people could see were improving their area.

Miss M McIlveen: Obviously, the inclusion of the A7 in the October monitoring round would be very helpful. Without

providing the specifics of the scheme, can he give me any information on the A24 Ballynahinch bypass?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. We have moved rather deftly from Doran's Rock to the Ballynahinch bypass. I have no difficulty in saying that the Ballynahinch bypass is a scheme worthy of support. In fact, my party leader, Mike Nesbitt, who is also a Member for Strangford, has been keen to promote that scheme. As the Member will know, I have met traders and local representatives in Ballynahinch. We understand the issues that are prevalent there. There are still a number of stages to be gone through on the technical side of things, leading ultimately to procurement, so it is likely that the earliest time for the scheme would be in the new budgetary period.

A2/A8: Compensation

7. **Mr Wilson** asked the Minister for Regional Development why his Department has allowed documentation from the commissioner, which could help to decide compensation levels for the A2 and the A8, to be destroyed. (AQT 137/11-15)

I welcome the progress on the two road schemes in east Antrim, the A2 and the A8, but there are many people who still are unhappy with the way in which the Department deals with some of the compensation issues.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question and, obviously, for his support for the A2 and A8 schemes. They will substantially improve travelling times and the connectivity that is so necessary. The Member has raised a particular issue, and, if he wishes to write to me directly with the detail, I will be happy to give him a full and detailed explanation.

3.00 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that the time for topical questions is up. We will move to the questions for oral answer that have been listed for the Minister. Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Blackrock Area, Newtownabbey

1. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has recently inspected the roads, footways and street lighting at Blackrock Square and Blackrock Park Avenue, Newtownabbey. (AQO 4660/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials carried out an inspection on all the development in that area on 18 September 2013. Since being served with an article 11 enforcement notice, the developer has made significant progress. First, a closed-circuit television (CCTV) survey of the sewers has been completed within phases 1 to 3, and the results are expected to be with NI Water representatives shortly, confirming that repairs have been made. In addition, the Department has approved in principle the street lighting design, and officials await further technical documentation from the developer in the next few weeks to allow adoption of the street lighting to proceed. When all underground services are adopted, a final surface course will be placed, allowing the Blackrock development to be adopted.

Officials in my Department work continually with developers so that developments are brought up to the required standard for adoption. I advise the Member that,

in the greater Belfast area, which comprises the Belfast, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North Down council areas, my Department has adopted 33 sites in the period 1 April to 20 September 2013. Four of those involved article 11 enforcement works by my Department.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answer. I raised the issue with him back in May, and I appreciate the work that his Department has done on this case. A date in early July was estimated for completion of the streets, yet they remain unfinished. Will he provide assurances to the residents of Blackrock that he will continue to pressure the developer on this matter?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. Of course, Roads Service officials have worked hard to progress this, and I am confident that that will continue to be the case.

Mr Dallat: I assure the House that I have not moved my abode to Newtownabbey. My question is about the effectiveness of inspections in reducing the millions of pounds in compensation claims that, prior to Mr Kennedy's appointment, the Department paid out.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am afraid to say that I am not going to take responsibility for events that predate me, and the Member will know that. However, if there are any current issues that he wishes to raise with me, I am happy to hear from him.

Johnston's Bridge, Enniskillen

2. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to allay the concerns of residents and business owners following the revelation that Johnston's Bridge, Enniskillen, has failed a European strength test. (AQO 4661/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware of the recent media attention suggesting that the Johnston Bridges over the east channel of the Erne river, which runs through Enniskillen, had failed a recent European strength test. I confirm that there is no such thing as a European strength test, nor is my Department aware of the source of such a claim.

The Johnston Bridges, like all bridges in Northern Ireland, are subject to a regular programme of inspections every two years. A more detailed inspection is carried out every six years in which structural engineers closely inspect all parts of the structure. The most recent inspection, undertaken in July 2012, did not highlight any evidence that would cause concern about the load-bearing capacity of the bridge or the continued use of the bridges by vehicular traffic. The bridges, which were opened in 1954, will, however, require some minor repair works to ensure that their condition is preserved. Officials will continue to monitor all bridges, including the Johnston's Bridges, and will work to progress the bridge-strengthening programme.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that clarity and for the history lesson, which, I am sure, we all really enjoyed.

I hope that the Minister is not splitting hairs by taking umbrage at my use of the phrase "European strength test". Is he in a position to clarify that Johnston's Bridge has not failed any kind of a test in the past few months?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. I had hoped that I had outlined to him that Johnston's Bridge is not regarded as being under serious threat nor an unsafe structure. That is very good news, and it is important that we convey that message, particularly to people in Enniskillen and County Fermanagh. Of course, they will remain on our rolling list for repairs, but I am assured there is nothing of an unsafe nature about the Johnston Bridges that warrants immediate remedial work.

The Member should bear it in mind that my Department has to look after 5,800 bridges. I am pleased to say that we do that on an ongoing basis and work hard to ensure that they are looked after. Safety has to be the paramount concern.

Mr Byrne: I want to ask the Minister about a bridge in Newtown Stewart that certainly has failed the test. We are waiting for it to be upgraded and refurbished. I also welcome the work that has been carried out by Roads Service on bridges in Beragh, Victoria Bridge and, more recently, a stone bridge at Mountjoy.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his detailed knowledge of and guide to bridges in west Tyrone and other areas. I am pleased that work to secure and maintain bridges has been happening. Of course, if the Member has further concerns about any of the bridges he mentioned or any others, he should communicate those to the Department as quickly as possible.

Mr Elliott: I will bring it back to Johnston's Bridge in Enniskillen. The Minister mentioned that it is part of a rolling programme of bridge upgrades and maintenance. Will he give us an indication of the timescale for the work on Johnston's Bridge?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. We certainly expect that work to commence within a couple of years. My sense is that the road surface and the deck waterproofing is likely to need replaced at some point. Of course, the bridge plays an important role in the life of Enniskillen, and it will be important to carefully manage the programming of that work so as to minimise any disruption to traffic flows. My information is that the earliest that that work is scheduled to be carried out is 2014-15. However, it is more likely that it will be the year after.

By way of record, in January 1999, 955 bridges required strengthening, but, because of the ongoing programme of work — the rolling programme that I referred to — that figure has now been reduced significantly to something like 283. We have spent £85 million to achieve that, and that indicates that we continue to take these things seriously.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Mervyn Storey is not in his place.

Kinnegar Lagoons Sewage Works

4. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Kinnegar Lagoons sewage works improvement scheme. (AQO 4663/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the first phase of the £3.5 million project to resolve the sewerage pollution at Kinnegar Lagoons is progressing well. The project is at tender stage, and work is expected

to commence in spring 2014 with a construction period of approximately 12 months. That phase of the project will prevent further pollution to the lagoons. A second phase will involve a scientific investigation that will determine the best remediation options for the lagoons and, particularly, for the odours that emanate from the mud at low tide. Remedial work will be undertaken on the basis of the scientific recommendations. The investigation is under way, and it is estimated that the emerging findings will be available in spring 2014.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister recognise that the ongoing stink and environmental pollution, which have been experienced by Holywood residents and commuters on the A2 Bangor dual carriageway in particular for over 20 years, are totally unacceptable? Will the measures that are now proposed give us assurance that they will address the matter once and for all?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I can well imagine the frustration and anger felt by a great many householders and business owners who live close by. The Member knows that this has been a historical problem over many years. I am pleased that the scheme that is planned and is at an advanced stage will be the first part in seeking to resolve the issues. It is important that, as we carry out the works for the waste water treatment plant, we await and assess the scientific report, which will be crucial in dealing with the legacy issues of the lagoon.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response so far. As has been said, the problem has existed for at least 20 years. I notice that, in 2010, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency issued a warning letter to the DRD. Will the Minister explain how the project will resolve the issue of odours and prevent pollution of these important lagoons?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and his welcome for the work that is about to commence. Phase 1 of the project will divert the combined sewer overflow discharges to the Kinnegar works and away from the lagoons, and it will comprise the construction of a new interceptor sewer and pumping station. It is hoped that phase 2 will address the odours from the lagoons and undertake remedial work. It is envisaged that, once both phases are complete, the frequency and severity of the odours in the area will be greatly reduced, if not eliminated. It is right that we are cautious enough to say that the scientific investigations will be key to making progress on phase 2 of the project.

Mr Lyttle: As a member for East Belfast, which is in close proximity to the area in question, I am aware of the seriousness of the issue. Is the Minister willing to meet the Mayor of North Down, Alliance councillor Andrew Muir, who has campaigned on the issue for a number of years, and a cross-party delegation of councillors on this important matter for residents and commuters in the area?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and for promoting his party colleague, with whom I have had meetings on other issues. I am generally receptive to elected representatives, and I like to be known as a listening Minister. When requests come in, I do my level best to accede to them, if appropriate. That might encourage you to speak to your friend.

Immigration Control: Strangford

5. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department's plans to provide fenced areas for immigration control in Strangford village have been abandoned and will not be resurrected. (AQO 4664/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am conscious of the importance of Strangford as a tourism area. The Member knows that we are under pressure to make security arrangements, for want of a better title, for the cruise ships that berth in that area. Hence, at one stage, a planning application had been submitted. I have taken action to have that application withdrawn. I intend to make a special case about arrangements for the area with the Department for Transport in London, and I have asked to meet the relevant Minister to put forward the unique circumstances that we have here.

3.15 pm

Not many cruise ships berth there on a yearly basis. However, that can continue to be developed, and I do not want people to be put off for any reason. Nonetheless, there are requirements that we have to meet, and we will see where those discussions take us.

Mr Wells: I hoped that the Minister would say that the project was shelved. I accept that there have to be special arrangements for cruise liners, but could passengers not be shepherded into a nearby building rather than building a cage-like structure, which is totally inappropriate not only for the village of Strangford but the village of Portaferry, just across the narrows, which was equally going to have one inflicted on it? It is simply just the wrong facility in the wrong place.

Mr Kennedy: I assure the Member that I am on the same side as him. In fact, I have been proactive in ensuring that the current planning application was withdrawn by my Department. We can resolve this through use of the temporary structures or some appropriate structure. I will approach the discussions with colleagues in London with that in mind in order to resolve this issue to the satisfaction of, hopefully, everyone.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. I welcome his withdrawal of what was an ill-advised planning application at new quay, Strangford, this month, which would have deprived local people of ongoing access to the lough. Will the Minister now bring forward proposals to develop Newry quay, in Strangford village, which is owned by DRD, as a vehicle to service local tourism and, perhaps, to service sea-based tidal and wind farms that are being built off the coast in that area?

Mr Kennedy: The Member has wandered slightly off the subject, I suppose to his own advantage. We will make ourselves available to meet with and discuss further initiatives with relevant and interested agencies such as the local council and, perhaps, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board or whichever government agency or Department wishes to engage with us. There is much work to do to resolve the current situation, but simply withdrawing the planning application is a significant signal of my thinking on this issue.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn

Parking Charges: Magherafelt

7. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on car-park charges in Magherafelt. (AQO 4666/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials are making the necessary legislative changes via a new off-street parking order, which will see the tariff in Central car park, Magherafelt, reduced to 40p for three hours. The proposal is to be advertised in the local Magherafelt newspapers on 30 September, which is today. The new arrangement is expected to be in operation by November 2013.

Following a request from Magherafelt District Council, my officials also visited the Rainey Street, Central and Union Road pay-and-display car parks on 12 June 2013 to distribute information leaflets and speak to customers to promote the benefits of using Parkmobile to pay for parking. The Parkmobile cashless payment system is available in all my Department's pay-and-display off-street car parks and on-street charge car-parking locations throughout Northern Ireland. That system provides customers with a method to pay for parking other than using coins at the pay-and-display machines.

Usage of the Parkmobile system over Northern Ireland stands at 4%, with 35,000 vehicles registered and 128,000 transactions since January. If local councils feel that local economies would benefit from a relaxation of on-street charges in Roads Service's car parks, officials will be happy to engage with them to explore what may be feasible.

Officials recently accommodated a request from Newtownabbey Borough Council to introduce free car parking in The Square car park in Ballyclare on Saturdays during March 2013 and are considering a request for a similar arrangement for Saturdays in December 2013 and January 2014.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister has certainly been listening on the issue. There is no doubt that businesses and residents in the Magherafelt area will welcome his decision. However, the decision to introduce charges in the Central car park and to make approximately 50% of spaces pay-and-display rather than free has had a knock-on effect and caused difficulties in nearby streets. I have written to the Minister on the issue. Will he ensure that, where the charges have been introduced, footpaths are not obstructed for disabled people or parents pushing children in prams?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. We will take those comments on board, particularly in respect of safety issues. The issue of car-parking fees can be challenging, but we have sought to strike a reasonable balance. Such charges are necessary to keep traffic moving and to ensure turnover so that shops can benefit from more regular visits from people who want to come into towns such as Magherafelt.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his action in Magherafelt. I have met him a couple of times on the issue. I place on record my thanks to him for that.

Will the Minister update the House on the progress with Parkmobile since it was first piloted in Belfast?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her positive comments and for her role in bringing forward those issues about Magherafelt.

Parkmobile was first piloted in Belfast in 2011. By 2012, usage was at 4%, and by 2013, that had more than doubled to 9%. Therefore, just shy of one in 10 of all payments in Belfast is now being made through the Parkmobile system. The system was introduced throughout Northern Ireland in November 2012, and usage was around 4%. As anticipated, I hope that that will increase over the next 12 months, as was the case in Belfast.

The system is being promoted in towns throughout Northern Ireland, and the public response from those who have engaged has been positive. At this early stage, I am pleased with the one-in-10 usage in Belfast and one-in-25 usage throughout Northern Ireland. We will continue to monitor progress and hope that we can promote it further.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Has he any plans to introduce machines in DRD parking facilities that give change, and, particularly in parking facilities close to the border, machines that accept euros?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Machines that issue change would add further cost to the overall cost of car-parking services, and I would have to consider carefully whether we were getting value for money. That is one of the benefits of the Parkmobile system because you register for parking and, on your return, you re-register, and it charges you the exact amount. That is another encouragement for people to use it.

Mr Byrne previously raised the issue of euros with me. I will happily update the Member in writing on the current situation.

Integrated Transport Pilot Scheme

8. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the integrated transport pilot scheme. (AQO 4667/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Early work on the integrated transport pilot project has focused on identifying opportunities for the rationalisation of school services and public transport services provided by the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) and Translink to a joint campus in Dungannon. That work has resulted in integration on four routes, which, from today, will mean pupils transferring from SELB services to utilise spare capacity on existing Translink services. The initial exercise shows that there are clear opportunities to do things better. It also highlights the benefits of Departments and transport providers working collaboratively in local areas.

The next phase of work will involve examining opportunities for rationalisation in the provision of special needs transport in the Dungannon area, involving the Southern Education and Library Board and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The project team also plans to consider what opportunities exist to utilise community transport more effectively, possibly by involving it more in meeting school transport requirements in rural locations and by extending the collect-and-connect type services that it currently provides for mainstream Translink services.

At this stage, the pilot project is scheduled to last for about 12 months, during which time the Departments

involved will also take forward the monitoring and evaluation arrangements. The evaluation will capture the potential for operational efficiencies and customer service improvements as a result of service integration, in the expectation that further improvements can be implemented over the period of a pilot early next year. The Departments involved will also begin work on an economic appraisal to inform the implementation of such integration on a wider scale over the longer term.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. Has the health service totally assisted in the process of the pilot scheme?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his initial comment. His supplementary seems to indicate some doubt, either in his mind or on his behalf, that the health authorities are not cooperating. That is not information available to me at this point. If the Member has concerns, I would be happy if he shared them with me.

Ms Lo: I understand that the pilot scheme is mostly about public transport. What role does the Minister envisage that cycling can play in the integration scheme?

Mr Kennedy: I am very pleased that the Member raised the issue of cycling. She will know that I am a very keen supporter and keen advocate of it. The time for cycling is now upon us. Hence, I am in the process of creating a cycling unit in the Department that can coordinate all aspects of the policy and its outworkings in transport arrangements. I am very pleased that there has been a lot of positive feedback on that. I think that there is widespread acceptance that cycling has been ignored for too long and has been something of a Cinderella — not now. I think that cycling will be actively promoted, and I welcome the Member's enthusiasm for it.

South-east Coast Master Plan

9. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his Department's involvement in the south-east coast master plan. (AQO 4668/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials from my Department and Translink are committed to assessing and developing the key roads and transport aspects of the south-east coast master plan, which was published by the Department for Social Development in February 2013. They will engage with all stakeholders, including the appointed consultants, to ascertain which aspects of the plan my Department can assist with. I am aware that meetings have already taken place. My Department will continue to take note of feedback from the consultation process and continue to be available to discuss the key opportunities and issues highlighted in the area of transportation.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: A quick supplementary, Sean; we are running out of time.

3.30 pm

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Minister, what initial steps is your Department taking to ensure that the road infrastructure is improved as part of the south-east coast master plan?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. On an ongoing basis, we seek to improve the overall road network, both the strategic road network and the local road network, in all areas. However, it is useful that, where there are opportunities to share with other Departments and be aware of their initiatives, we can tie into those and either offer advice or indicate how we would seek to proceed with road improvement. I am certainly keen that, in the roads that we maintain and in any roads that we propose to build, a coordinated, sensible and logical approach is taken. That includes areas and roads in the Member's constituency and all through Northern Ireland.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up. That concludes Question Time.

Private Members' Business

Exploitation of Children and Young People

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent revelations regarding the abuse and exploitation of children and young people; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to liaise with the Minister of Justice to initiate an inquiry to ascertain the prevalence of abuse and exploitation of children both in care and elsewhere; and further calls on all relevant Departments to outline the strategies that will be put in place to safeguard and protect children and young people in care. — [Ms Maeve McLaughlin.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "protect" and insert

"all children and young people." — [Mr Beggs.]

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome today's debate on the exploitation and abuse of children, particularly the focus on children in care and beyond. You will have heard a number of voluntary organisations claim that what we know is only the tip of the iceberg, and since the disclosure of a police investigation into child sexual exploitation, attention has focused on children in care, as many of you have in your contributions. I can understand why, given the reported statistics from the police of 18 young people in care missing 437 times over an 18-month period.

I will take you back to the Barnardo's report, because we have known what it said for around two years now. Its findings came from a sample of over 1,100 cases. We wanted to get a measure of the scale of the problem, and that is why we commissioned the report, which relates to children known to social services, including looked-after children (LAC). The majority of the cases, around 779, are looked-after children, and of the LAC total, 618 were in residential care, 34 were in foster care and 36 were in kinship care. The remaining are in at-home placements. Of the 1,100 cases, it was assessed that one in five was at risk of exploitation and that one in five had been missing overnight or longer within the past year. Three out of five were from the residential care population, which leaves two out of five in the non-residential care population. So, although it is important to identify the issues and problems in residential care homes, the problem does not end there; we have a much wider problem that has to be addressed. We should not seek to simplify things too much when we look at this issue, because it is much more complex and difficult and is not served well by simplification. Frankly, it gives a very shocking and bleak picture of our care system in that children can go missing and 18 young people have been missing from care 437 times over an 18-month period. To me, that is not good enough and is one reason why I want the review to take place and to be wholly independent.

We should not be under the impression that staff just stand idly by and allow these things to happen. That would be grossly unfair. They try to stop young people leaving. However, they are not always able to prevent them from leaving. Not preventing something from happening is not the same as allowing something to happen. I want to make it very clear that we have many good staff in children's

residential care homes who do their best for young people who have been badly damaged long before they have become their responsibility. I want to say thank you and pay tribute to those staff, who work under very difficult situations, and I want to ensure that we make things easier for them in identifying the best resolutions and the way forward.

There has been an accusation made that we did not act on the Barnardo's report. I make it absolutely clear that there have been quite a number of Assembly questions on the subject. As opposed to my reading out all the answers concerning the actions that have been taken, which my 15 minutes would not allow me to, I encourage those who make such an accusation to read the answers to those questions. We have taken actions in every area. For example, social services are embedded with the PSNI; we are supporting safe choices; we did establish a Safeguarding Board; and we have introduced additional therapeutic care for children and young people. It is very important that people recognise that and that we do not get nonsense put out to the public that we have been sitting on the Barnardo's report from 2011 and not acting on it. It is not accurate, not true and not helpful to make those suggestions.

Sexual exploitation is not a new phenomenon. In fact, in the Victorian era, many people recognised that railway stations were a magnet for those who wanted to exploit children, because many children were running away from bad situations. Often they were leaving a bad situation to arrive at a worse one. To that extent, some things have not changed, and I regret that. The issue will not be addressed overnight and by one Minister acting on his or her own. Today's child sexual exploitation appears to be more widespread and pernicious, with new dimensions to it that are harder to grasp. Youth and celebrity culture — reinforced through TV and media — portrays an image that sex, drugs, alcohol, parties and disposable relationships are the norm. That is hugely damaging. The fabric of society is undermined by that constant portrayal.

Schools have a vital role to play, along with us, in our efforts to address those broader societal issues, in raising awareness about the risk of child sexual exploitation and in identifying those at risk or who are being exploited. One of the scary things about this is that young people do not realise that they are being exploited. Even more scary is the fact that some of the perpetrators do not even realise that they are perpetrators. They are, and nobody should take away from the Chamber that I am suggesting anything else. However, some of them do not actually get that what they are doing is criminal, wrong, evil and wicked. Nonetheless, because they have been numbed to that reality by so many things around them, they do not realise that.

We need to be sure that we are doing everything that we can to prevent children from being sexually exploited. For that reason, I made the decision to appoint an independent expert in the area to conduct an inquiry into what we are doing and how effectively we are doing it; to determine whether there are barriers to doing things better; and to make recommendations. The expert or experts, whom we are still in the process of identifying, will be from outside Northern Ireland and independent. I will bring a further statement to the House, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, on how we intend to progress that.

I am indebted to the Minister of Justice for agreeing to join me in the exercise. With his full agreement, the review will be supported and facilitated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority on my side working jointly with Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland. I have suggested that it would be helpful for the Education and Training Inspectorate to join us in the review and for the Department of Education to be involved. If we are looking at an issue in which 20% of the problem rests with children in care and 80% elsewhere, schools are the only place where you can pick up on those children. It is fundamentally important that the Department of Education join us in the review exercise in order to identify whether there is more to be done on that front that can assist all of us to arrive at the outcome that we want. To achieve that, it is important that we receive that Department's support.

I have already made a statement to the House setting out the broad remit of the review and the detail of what remains to be worked through. However, I have listened carefully to what has been said this afternoon, and I will consider all the points that were raised as we try to work out the detail. As I said, I will make a full statement on the inquiry.

I am mindful about previous investigations. I am not going down the route of having a full-blown legal inquiry. Some people may want that, but let me make it clear that we are not doing that. One reason is that the hyponatremia inquiry is ongoing. That inquiry started in 2004 and will be finished and reported on, hopefully, next year. I am not sure whether it will be, but, hopefully, it will. I cannot wait for 10 years to respond to these youngsters' needs. I need to respond this year and next year, and we need to get the details of any investigation kicking off quickly. It must be well thought out and well balanced, but it must kick off quickly so that we can get immediate feedback and act very quickly on the recommendations. That is what we did with the Troop review on pseudomonas, and it proved effective. So, why would I go down the route of having a long and drawn-out process when the learning that we would achieve at the end of it would have already been applied during the process? In truth, that has largely happened with hyponatremia. Things changed long before the inquiry report. So, for an inquiry to be useful and effective, it needs to report quickly.

I am also directing the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to undertake a thematic review of the children's cases that triggered the current police investigation. Some of the young people are now adults and cannot be subject to a case management review. I am directing a thematic review, as it is in my power to do so. I will meet the chair of the SBNI next week to seek his counsel and to ensure that the independence and objectivity are inbuilt into the arrangements from the outset.

The motion also asks the Department to set out what it is planning to do in strategic terms to respond to the sexual exploitation of children in Northern Ireland. First, what we do strategically —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: Yes, certainly.

Mr Allister: Just before the Minister leaves the subject of the Safeguarding Board, if he is leaving it, what is the explanation for the fact that the enabling legislation for the Safeguarding Board passed in February 2011,

yet it appears not to have been until 19 months later, in September 2012, that the Safeguarding Board was appointed? Did that seemingly inordinate delay have a negative impact on contributing to where we are now?

Mr Poots: OK. It is a new board, and it took some time to set up and recruit people to post, including the chair. Members may remember that there was a dispute about remuneration for the chair, and with the intervention of elected representatives, that amount increased. There were problems in recruiting a director of operations, and the post had to be re-advertised. Secondary legislation had to be put in place, which required redrafting the regulations, consulting on them and taking them through the process of getting made. The Committee took evidence from officials and the chair designate of the SBNI prior to the regulations being made. Unfortunately, the SBNI was not established as quickly as we would have liked because of the issues that were beyond our control. I accept that that was a failing on our part going back to the original legislation and the problems that we encountered. So, we need to recognise that, when we identify the right thing to do, we must ensure that it happens expeditiously and that we are not delayed unnecessarily. The Member is quite right to identify that having a 19-month delay was not good enough. However, the board is now in place, it is carrying out the review and it has identified a strategic priority. It will continue to coordinate the multi-agency plan in response to children and young people in care.

If I am asked today whether we have failed these young people, I would have to answer yes. However, we have failed these young people for the past 15 or 16 years, not just the past one or two. We need to act to help children and young people, and that is why I support the hubs that we are proposing to set up in conjunction with Atlantic Philanthropies, other Ministers and the early intervention fund. That is why I supported integrated services for children and young people in west Belfast and did not think that it was worth letting go. I know that others perhaps thought that it was not worth saving. Given the vulnerability of the children from the most deprived area in Northern Ireland, I thought that we should not let it go. Others thought that it might be a good idea to scrap integrated services, which was hugely regrettable.

3.45 pm

I am absolutely committed to helping children and young people in those early years. We need the full cooperation —

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: My time has almost gone. I am sorry.

We need the full cooperation of every Department. It is not about the Health Department alone. It is not about the Department of Justice alone. It is not about the Department of Education alone. If all those Departments come together, work together and stay together, and we do not engage in politicking or exploiting the issue, we will come out of today much stronger on the issue and we will offer better protection to children in the future.

Mrs Overend: I am making the winding-up speech on the amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party in the names of my colleague Roy Beggs and me. This is a very important issue before the House today. I commend Sinn Féin for taking the opportunity to raise it. Ms McLaughlin brought some vital points to the debate, including the need

to ensure that the laws dealing with child exploitation are robust and that punishment is adequate. I thank the Health Minister for his response this afternoon. We have a job to do in ensuring that those who are exploiting our children and young people know that they are in the wrong. That behaviour, no matter how or where it is seen to be the norm, must be recognised as being wrong and unlawful. I welcome Sinn Féin's support for the amendment. I agree with Ms McLaughlin and the Member for Newry and Armagh's sentiments that it is vital that we get the right messages to the community and not just young people in care.

Child sexual abuse is surely one of the most awful crimes imaginable. The recent revelations have been met with shock and disgust. It was said that, in some respects, the wording of the motion has been pre-empted by the Health Minister. Last Wednesday, Mr Poots announced an independent expert-led inquiry into child sex exploitation in Northern Ireland. I welcome that step.

The Sinn Féin Members who spoke said that the inquiry must be robust and independent and must look at failures. I add that we need to ensure that, rather than just an exercise in navel-gazing, there is action quickly. I note that the NSPCC made it clear in the media that it believes that it is not the right time for an independent inquiry into the sexual exploitation of young people in Northern Ireland. It believes that our focus should be on directing scarce resources to ensure that children at risk of sexual exploitation are being protected and kept safe here and now. I understand and fully agree with that sentiment. However, the terms of the inquiry include the remit to:

"determine the most pertinent issues that need to be addressed that can help to prevent, tackle and disrupt CSE;"

and to:

"examine the effectiveness of current measures aimed at tackling, preventing and disrupting CSE;"

Those actions will ensure that children are protected in the here and now. I also make the extremely serious point that we, as politicians, must never act in a manner that complicates or compromises police investigations. We should be careful of our actions in that regard, whether that be through the provision of information to the media or otherwise.

I welcome the DUP support for the Ulster Unionist amendment today. Mr Wells talked about that sort of behaviour happening in many areas and being deemed as normal. I share his concern about opportunities for grooming in social media. His colleague Mr Dunne raised the same issue. I hope that they will join me in urging the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to respond to my pleas for progress on a departmental strategy on internet safety. Indeed, as Mr Dunne said, it is important that all Departments work together and look at their role in addressing child exploitation. It is equally important that grass-roots people in the community realise how wrong those actions are.

I was rather disappointed by the political posturing and one-upmanship expressed by the DUP's Paul Givan. We are not here to play the blame game; we are here to do what is right for our children and young people and for Northern Ireland.

I also welcome the contribution to the debate by SDLP Members. Mr McGlone rightly expressed the view that any inquiry will not only bring answers but will raise many questions. I share the view of Mr Maginness that the immediate priority is that children and young people should experience no further risk or distress. I join him in asking for an accurate assessment.

I thank the Alliance Member Mr McCarthy for his support for the amendment. He rightly recognised that this is a multifaceted problem, with the Health Department taking the lead. I agree that this should be a speedy and efficient inquiry. I also thank John McCallister for his support today. It is nice to see it, and long may it continue. Jest aside, Mr McCallister raised some concerns around resources, which is a problem with all aspects of government decisions. I thank him for that.

Returning to the Ulster Unionist amendment; it is the case that child sexual exploitation is not confined to care homes or children in care. Although, in this case, the information suggests that the majority of children who were subjected to abuse went missing from care homes, there were and are other children outwith the care system, in this particular police investigation and more generally.

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

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht agus an tacaíocht ó gach páirtí. I welcome the debate and the all-party support for the motion, and, as Mrs Overend said, we are supporting the amendment.

Three decades ago, women's organisations created a fundamental shift in understanding and acting to end violence against women and children. In the past, gender-based violence was confined to whispers and taboos. No longer; it is now part of the public debate. Violence against women and children is a crime, and it needs to be treated as a crime. Rape is a profound violation of our bodily integrity and our right to dignity, security and freedom from discrimination. Rape is a weapon used by some men to control and dominate women. Women, slowly but surely, are naming the crimes against us and our children, and we expect action where crimes are committed against us. Women and children expect to be safe in our homes, our workplaces, our social life, our health centres, our schools and our universities. We do not want the lack of action or failure to act to be dressed up as being because this is complex or is a blame game or because it is difficult or because we do not want to re-criminalise the victims and survivors.

We do not want the juvenile games that we saw earlier today from the Chair of the Justice Committee, Paul Givan. He blatantly attempted to divert necessary scrutiny. Such behaviour does no service to children and young people. We want these crimes to be fully investigated. We want the victims and survivors to get justice and to be provided with the services that they deserve, and we will work with all organisations that have a track record in safeguarding children to ensure that children and young people will not be criminalised or stigmatised in any way. There needs to be a step change in our society regarding violence against women and children, and every Department has a particular role to play. We do not want excuses when they do not do the work that they are supposed to do.

When I was in the Department of Education, I made safeguarding children a top priority. During my tenure as

Education Minister, we engaged with Women's Aid and developed and funded a very innovative programme to train teachers in early intervention in relation to emotional, physical and sexual violence against women and children. It was called the Helping Hands programme, and it was age appropriate. During my time, we put counsellors into every single post-primary school, and, under John O'Dowd's leadership, DE is playing its role fully on the Safeguarding Board. The Department has also established a child protection support service for schools, which is a helpline and structured training to enhance this work. John O'Dowd continues to prioritise protecting children, and he stands ready to learn any lessons from the inquiry and will obviously work with all agencies and Departments.

Sinn Féin makes no apology in calling for an inquiry into the rape and abuse of these young people. Sinn Féin believes that it is the tip of the iceberg, and we understand that only by carrying out a thorough inquiry — inquiry, Minister; not a review — will we ensure that it is given the priority it deserves.

I was at the detailed briefing at the Policing Board, and I absolutely support Sandra Overend's comments about protecting police investigations. I went into the meeting concerned and came out even more concerned. The Barnardo's report did not get the priority that it should have by the Department of Health. Out of five recommendations, it implemented one. The reality is that it did not do enough. I would have much greater respect for the Minister if he began implementing the recommendations, stopped being so defensive and began to provide the necessary resources now for the four recommendations that were not completed. We do not need to wait for an inquiry for those recommendations to be completed.

The PSNI has come out with its hands up. The issue did not get the priority it should have in the PSNI at the highest level of the organisation. This is not about denying the work that goes on in certain sections of the PSNI. It is about the failure of the senior leadership to prioritise it and put it into the policing plan, despite the fact that there were endless discussions about it at Policing Board meetings. Recommendation 6 should have been implemented by the PSNI, and Sinn Féin will continue to fight for that recommendation at the Policing Board. Minister Ford needs to ensure that that recommendation is carried out fully.

I was also concerned to hear some Members, a few days ago the House, use the issue of the British National Crime Agency (NCA) as part of a political point-scoring exercise. In particular, claims have been made that information and analysis by other agencies to help the PSNI prevent and detect child online exploitation will be lost unless the British NCA gets to impose two-tier, unaccountable policing in the North. I find it disappointing to hear people use that in an emotive way on such an important issue as online exploitation of children. Online child exploitation is detected through an international network, which includes the cooperation of industry and the role of the North American-based National Criminal Intelligence Resource Centre. That type of crime requires international information sharing. In the current structure, early analysis and risk assessment is carried out by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and then passed to the PSNI for executive action. It is incorrect

and very misleading to say that work will not happen in the devolved sphere without NCA in the North.

The Minister for Justice is claiming that information on crime against children may be withheld from the PSNI in the future by other agencies in the criminal justice system. I believe that that is untrue. It is unfortunate that the Minister is not here today, but I have no doubt that he will read the debate, and I call on him to confirm to the Assembly that the PSNI will be given any information that it requires from wherever it requires in order to play its role in child protection. The PSNI — lest there be any doubt about it — is fully empowered and resourced to take action against online predators and paedophiles.

I agree that there should be no political spat on this issue, and I am concerned about some of the whisperings and briefings behind the scenes. I hope that Members are not saying that people in positions of responsibility such as Maeve McLaughlin, as Chair of the Health Committee, or me, as a member of the Policing Board, should not be playing our role in scrutiny and accountability. *[Interruption.]* The defensive people are muttering away there. What needs to happen here is that children —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not.

Children must be safeguarded and protected, and there is no justification when they are not. Society will have much greater respect for people who stand up and say, "We did this; we did not do that; we should have done it". That is what we need to hear. Let me tell you that Maeve will continue in her role of scrutinising the Minister of Health and working with him, and our policing team and I will continue our role in holding the Chief Constable and his team to account.

When they do good work, we will give them credit; when they fall down, we will be the first to ask questions and make no apology about it.

We understand. Sinn Féin takes its responsibilities on safeguarding very seriously. We understand that predators and abusers of women and children thrive in secrecy, poor accountability and by shifting the blame. That is why we called for and support a fully independent inquiry with powers. That is why we will continue our work on this. We will take our responsibilities very seriously.

4.00 pm

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent revelations regarding the abuse and exploitation of children and young people; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to liaise with the Minister of Justice to initiate an inquiry to ascertain the prevalence of abuse and exploitation of children both in care and elsewhere; and further calls on all relevant Departments to outline the strategies that will be put in place to safeguard and protect all children and young people.

Farm Safety Investment Scheme

Mr Principal 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 wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Buchanan: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the number of fatalities and injuries on farms; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to build upon the good work of the Farm Safety Partnership by, as a matter of urgency, providing adequate funding for a farm safety investment scheme to help protect people working on farms and encourage real and practical investment in farm safety.

First, I express my sympathy to all the farming families in the agriculture community who have lost a loved one, should that be an elderly person or a child, as a result of an accident on the farm. Many homes in the farming community have had a loved one taken from them by an accident that, in hindsight, could have been avoided by a little preparation before work was carried out on a farm. Today, we want to assure those families of our continued thoughts and prayers for them as we debate the motion.

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

Farming is a vital part of the Northern Ireland economy, providing employment to almost 47,000 people across 24,500 farms. Unfortunately, the safety record of farming in Northern Ireland is poor and continues to represent a disproportionate number of deaths compared with other sectors. We have all witnessed many fatal incidents on farms and know of thousands more people who have been injured or made ill while working in the farming environment. The death toll is unrelenting. In proposing the motion, I call on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to act swiftly by committing sufficient funds to a targeted farm safety investment scheme to enhance greatly the safety of the working environment on our farms.

The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSNI) has confirmed that farm safety continues to be its biggest challenge as it strives to improve health and safety standards in workplaces across Northern Ireland. Until three years ago, fatal accidents on farms accounted for approximately one third of workplace fatalities. That has since risen to almost 60%, with the number of work-related fatalities in 2012-13 totalling 19. Again, the farming sector dominated the fatal accident statistics, with 11 out of 19 deaths attributed to farm accidents. Considerable research has been carried out in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, Europe and worldwide to identify the main and underlying factors contributing to accidents in the farming sector. That work included careful analysis of the main and underlying causes of accidents in the industry and farmers' attitudes to health and safety, as well as research into slurry handling, work at height and machine design. The research has been used to help to tailor the Health and Safety Executive's health and safety measures and approach to enforcement for the farming sector. The Farm Safety Partnership, which is made up of the Health and Safety Executive, DARD, the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association,

the National Farmers' Union and the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster has a particular focus on the safety of farm workers and has employed a wide range of approaches to securing health and safety improvements on our farms.

The partnership launched its first farm action plan in November 2012 to look at ways to significantly reduce work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses on farms and drive up health and safety standards. The plan focused on four key areas: the provision of information and the promotion of a safe working area; health and safety training; motivating good practice; and collecting and analysing information. Everyone in the House appreciates that there is a culture of risk taking in the local agriculture industry; it is important that we work to change that mindset and work together to encourage farmers to stop and think about their working environment and the actions that they take.

In March, the partnership launched a major farm safety media advertising campaign, which, I am sure, we are all aware of. The campaign includes TV, radio and newspaper adverts that will run throughout the year. The main thrust of the Stay Farm Safe campaign was to advise farmers to Stop and Think SAFE — the main risks of slurry, animals, falls and equipment — before starting any farm job. The Stop and Think SAFE approach provides a process for farmers to carry out risk assessments and implement a safe system of work to manage risk based on the four main causes of accidents. The multimedia campaign is hard-hitting. It is designed to change the attitudes of farmers to risk and target their family members to encourage the implementation of safety measures.

Farming is an extremely tough profession, and the challenges are immense. It requires huge determination, tenacity and skill. However, it can be deadly. The indications are that farmers are well aware of the risks and what they should do. It is a matter of changing their mindset so that they think about the risk before starting any farm job and encouraging them to consider the consequences of a major accident on the future of their family and their farm business.

The Health and Safety Executive is committed to helping to eliminate work-related accidents on the farm that have resulted in children being killed. Being hit or run over by farm machinery is the biggest danger faced by children on our farms, and falling from tractors, drowning, being injured by animals or being hit by falling objects are the other main dangers faced. Through the Be Aware Kids: Child Safety on Farms campaign, the Health and Safety Executive has sought to explain the key safety messages in rural primary schools across Northern Ireland. There are also rural Bee Safe events targeted at 222 schools, and the aim is to reinforce the three key safety messages: children must be 13-years-old, have completed a recognised training course and have permission before they can drive a tractor under supervision; busy farmyards are dangerous places to play; and female animals with their young can see children as a threat and may attack.

Many of our farming community are so familiar with their individual cattle that it can lead to complacency, especially when handling bulls. A number of accidents — some fatal — happen every year because farmers fail to treat these animals with respect. A familiar comment from individuals injured by a bull is that they were astonished at the speed of the bull during the attack. I am sure that we can all look

to people in our constituency who have been attacked by bulls, and, unfortunately, some have even lost their life. It is important that the farming community is aware that a playful bull can kill just as easily as an angry one.

Many fatal accidents on Northern Ireland farms involve the operation of machinery. Power take-off shafts have been involved in many fatal injuries. Machines that are used while stationary — such as slurry pumps, slurry tanks, grain-roller mills, circular saws and standby generators — present the greatest risk to users. Most farmers know someone who has had a close shave with a power take-off (PTO) shaft. Unfortunately, many will know of someone who has been killed or has lost a limb as a result of becoming entangled on an unguarded shaft. Many accidents would have been prevented if the shaft had been correctly fitted with a guard that was properly used and maintained. The fact is that broken, damaged or badly fitted guards can be just as dangerous as having no guard at all.

The continuing high number of deaths, particularly among the farming community, illustrates the need for the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Agriculture to be constantly innovative and challenging. The research shows that, while most farmers appreciate that there are many dangers involved in everything that they do, too many do not routinely assess the risks and take a moment to think about what they are going to do and make preparations that will help to avoid injury or death. A startling statistic is that, on average, one farming family is bereaved every month.

We need adequate funding for a targeted farm investment scheme not only to enhance the safety of the working environment on our farms but to act as an incentive for our farming community to be more informed and to help to avoid the accidents that occur. A lot of good work is being done by the Health and Safety Executive, but that work has to be built on through proper investment in a proper scheme. There could be schemes such as providing facilities to cover PTO shafts and blades on saws —

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

Mr Buchanan: — for slurry detectors and all of that type of thing. We need investment from the Department to try to cut the risk of further farm accidents.

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

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome this opportunity to speak on the important issue of farm safety. Members will be aware that fatalities on the farm account for over 50% of work-related deaths here in the North. In real terms, in 2012-13, 11 out of 19 work-related deaths were farm accidents. Behind each fatality lies an immeasurable loss and a family devastated. There are also the unknown statistics for serious accidents and near misses, all of which can have a profound impact on the lives of those affected. Injuries can be long-term and debilitating and can mean an end to farm life. The nature and severity of accidents can leave a lasting trauma. Coming from a rural constituency, I am only too aware of the high potential for accidents. I know personally many people who have been injured as a result of such accidents.

The nature of a farm differs greatly from that of other employment sectors. Home and work life operate side by side. Every member of a family, regardless of age, is

involved in some way or another. Training is very much on the job, with methods and systems learnt from the generation before. Busy seasons can see farmers work from dawn to dusk with few breaks and under considerable pressure, particularly in this economic climate. This can lead to tiredness and lapses of concentration for anyone. However, the risk is intensified given that those working on farms work with powerful machinery and livestock that can turn on you without warning.

The media focus on recent tragedies has brought home to many the seriousness of the situation. Hard-hitting media campaigns have gone some way to highlighting the fact that farming is a dangerous business and a farm can be a dangerous place. The partnership approach taken by the various stakeholders, including DARD, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), HSENI, which has overall responsibility for health and safety in the workplace, the Ulster Farmers' Union, NIAPA, NFU and the Young Farmers' Clubs has been an important step, but it is crucial that everyone works collectively. That is the way to get real improvements in farm safety. Raising awareness and changing attitudes and behaviours, as well as devising new work methods and systems, are all elements of that approach. If there is uptake and a willingness on every level, there is real potential for change. That is not to say that we should not continue to look for other opportunities to improve safety for those working and living on farms. I support the motion.

4.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, I am aware of some background noise and interference. We have made the broadcasting unit aware of it. We will have to persevere in the meantime.

Mr Byrne: I, too, support this important motion and commend the signatories to it for tabling it.

Farm accidents and fatalities have been a major concern in the agriculture industry over the past number of years. There have been many deaths involving farm machinery, tractors, slurry tanks and slurry gas, as well as those involving animals, particularly bulls. Quite a number of older farmers have had accidents through falling from roofs and many children have been killed as a result of mishaps with machinery. Indeed, there were some examples of that over the summer. Farm-related deaths have a devastating effect on the families directly involved, as well as on neighbouring communities. Many are also killed or maimed by PTO shafts, which are very dangerous if not properly used and monitored. However, a very good initiative is being promoted at the moment on the use of and need for investment in good-quality PTO shafts. Many farm suppliers are involved in giving practical demonstrations for farmers.

For some time, the big question has been this: how can the number of farm-related deaths be reduced? The Farm Safety Partnership was launched in May 2012 by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. It was very welcome. Many stakeholders are involved in the safety partnership, including the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland. An action plan with the overall aim of eliminating work-related deaths on farms across Northern Ireland was launched in November 2012. At the time, the Health and Safety

Executive gave the following statistics: slurry accounted for approximately 15% of farm fatalities; animals were responsible for 27%; falls from sheds and so on and things falling on people accounted for another 27%; and accidents with equipment — tractors and machinery — accounted for another 27%.

Better training and advice needs to be provided to farmers and farm workers on the operation of tractors and machinery and on other farm-related work so that good practice in farming methods takes place in a farm safety-conscious environment. Practical training and refresher courses are needed so that the operators of tractors and other farm machinery are confident and competent in their machinery-handling techniques. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and the HSENI must become pioneers of planning and delivering relevant and practical courses for farm workers. DARD and DETI must place an emphasis on promoting those courses and provide the necessary funding to resource farm safety programmes. That means that more money needs to be invested in a farm safety programme of education and training. Modern tractors, farm machinery and equipment are often large machines that come with a large number of gadgets and controls as standard. There is a need for tractor and machinery suppliers to provide practical handling courses to the farmers and farm workers who operate them. If a tractor costs between £40,000 and £60,000, surely a handling course for the driver would make sense as part of the purchase deal.

There needs to be investment in slurry gas monitors, appropriate safety gate mechanisms and dedicated practical courses in slurry handling. There have been too many tragedies connected to slurry for the issue to be treated lightly. It is a serious issue. We are all too aware of the tragic farm loss where a father and two sons, members of the Spence family of County Down, lost their life last year.

In Northern Ireland, farm deaths run at the rate of about 11.7 deaths for each 100,000 people; in GB overall, it is 11.1 for each 100,000; and, in the Republic, it is much higher, at 31 deaths for each 100,000. Unfortunately, fatal accidents on farms accounted for one third of workforce fatalities until three years ago.

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

Mr Byrne: That has now risen to 50% of all workplace fatalities. DARD- and DETI-sponsored action is needed, and a partnership approach is vital for tackling the problem.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The Allen family from Moneymore and the tragic death of Henry only a few months ago come to mind. Although the family may be able to adapt to new circumstances, they will never forget Henry or the wretched way in which he lost his life. Unfortunately, that is not the only farm accident that has touched my life in recent times. I remember two other friends who lost their life and two who survived to tell the tale.

Of course, when recent tragic events have brought farm safety to the fore, we must remember that the problem is nothing new and that farming families have had to go through the anguish of farm fatalities for many years. It is startling that, in the 21st century, agriculture has become the most dangerous industry in the country. The agriculture industry often accounts for well over half of the work-

related fatalities in Northern Ireland. Think about that. Out of all the occupations in the different sectors, one in two workforce deaths occurs in our farming industry. If such a rate existed in our manufacturing industry, it would be addressed, and, if such a rate existed in our construction industry, it would be addressed. Why, therefore, should such a high rate be tolerated in agriculture?

Today's motion rightly calls on the Agriculture Minister to build on the work of the Farm Safety Partnership. As we all know, the aim of the partnership was to increase awareness of farm safety and to reduce work-related fatalities on farms. Awareness is key, and I am sure that the Minister rightly accepts that prevention is always better than the cure. Statistics show that the highest number of accidents on local farms occur with machinery. That is followed by injuries caused by animals, then slurry and then falls. Therefore, I hope that the Department starts with those.

Although farming families know the dangers and although the messages are often drilled into young people from an early age, accidents do, unfortunately, happen. I grew up on a working farm. I know the challenges that working with livestock and machinery present, but I also understand how it is not always possible to predict accidents from what may otherwise be considered the routine. No matter how timid an animal may be or how often you have worked with it in the past, it does not mean that it is not capable of seriously injuring its handlers. Tractors are also regularly involved in farm accidents in which, tragically, children are often caught up. Of course, it goes without saying that children are naturally curious; they will climb heights or get themselves into situations that would fill the parents of young children in the House with dread.

I praise the work of the Health and Safety Executive, particularly its effective leafleting campaigns and its work with children and young people. However, I acknowledge that, although we have unprecedented warnings of the dangers on farms, too many people are still being injured and killed on our farms. I, therefore, support the call in the motion for a farm safety investment scheme. Following the tragic deaths of the Spences, for instance, my party called for research on the development of new breathing equipment or gas detectors for farmers during the dangerous task of mixing slurry. Funding through a farm safety investment scheme, the farm modernisation programme or whatever other source could be used to develop straightforward yet life-saving equipment. I encourage the Minister to explore all possible funding opportunities. If and when such equipment becomes available, it should be actively promoted throughout the industry.

Mr McCarthy: At the outset, it is important to offer our total sympathy to all those from the farming community who, in recent times and, indeed, times past, have lost a loved one or, in some cases, more than one member of their family as a result of an accident on the farm.

We remain extremely grateful to our farmers and farm workers for the work that they do to provide food for our tables and for the contribution that they make to our economy in general. It is a hard life, with long hours and sleepless nights, yet our farmers are dedicated and love the work that they do. In the course of that work, things can happen totally unexpectedly but with serious and sometimes fatal results. We never think that it can happen

to us; it is always someone else, if not here at home, perhaps somewhere down south or across the water. The loss is the same everywhere, and the distress to families and communities remains unbearable, so it is important that we always have safety at the top of our thinking. The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland must be commended for the work that it does to inform people of the dangers, and it is up to the community in general to stop, think about and listen to good, sound advice so as to avoid accidents. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has been very active in promoting safety on and around the farm but more needs to be done.

The motion calls for:

"adequate funding for a farm safety investment scheme".

This request comes on the back of the good work being carried out by the Farm Safety Partnership. This partnership involves the important groups that are engaged in the farming industry; in other words, that group has the experts. We have all seen the multimedia advertising campaign that is designed to raise awareness of farm safety, and it is certainly doing its job. Only time will tell how successful or otherwise the campaign will have been.

It is a fact of life — indeed, different Ministers have acknowledged it — that farming is a tough profession. With recent pressures on agriculture, safety may not have been at the top of the agenda. It is more likely that shortcuts were taken to save time and money, and with that comes risk until something happens. It is then too late.

The Stop and Think SAFE campaign with slurry, animals, falls and equipment to the fore has to be heeded to prevent disasters on our farms. Getting the message of safety across to children at an early age is a very welcome part of the action plan. The HSENI will deliver key farm messages to over 90 rural schools — perhaps that has been done, but I hope that it will continue to be done — and it will hold a children's safety on farms poster competition annually. This is a positive move that will give children a good start in understanding safety on farms.

I understand that the Minister has given a commitment to fund any proposal that may come from the Farm Safety Partnership. I hope that she lives up to her promise.

Common sense tells us all, including the farming community, that a farm has many areas where danger lurks. Everyone must think safety when working in or near a farm. The Alliance Party supports the motion and hopes that no further disasters will happen on our farms.

Miss M McIlveen: Like other Members, I welcome the opportunity to speak about farm safety in Northern Ireland, which has the potential to affect so many farmers, families and communities right across the Province.

Everyone in the Chamber who represents a rural constituency will be aware of the dangers and challenges of rural life and, indeed, of those families who have been affected by tragedy. There is no doubt also that there is a need to protect people who work and live on farms across Northern Ireland. That has never been more potent. The reality is that, between January 2008 and August 2013, there were 41 local farm-related deaths. The breakdown of those figures is startling: 16 deaths as a result of accidents involving farm equipment, including vehicles; 10 fatalities

were caused by falls; nine animal-related deaths; and a further six caused by lethal slurry fumes. Those statistics translate into disproportionate losses for agriculture when compared with other industries. It is staggering to think that, in 2012-13, farming-related deaths accounted for almost 60% of work-related deaths.

To a large extent, this situation reflects the nature of the industry, which exposes people to high-risk situations, day and daily. However, they should not be regarded as mere statistics. They are fathers, husbands, sons and brothers, and their loss is devastating.

4.30 pm

With the rising death toll, it is necessary for us to give cognisance to the specific requirements of older farmers and young people, who all too often fall victim to the accidents and incidents that we have heard so much about in recent times and, indeed, that have been explored in the Chamber today. It goes without saying that, with an ageing demographic, the risk ultimately becomes even higher. I endorse Mr Byrne's comments about the need for education and training, how necessary that is and the investment that needs to be targeted at that specifically.

For a long time, there was a perception that not enough was being done to improve farm safety and encourage greater caution among farmers across Northern Ireland. I welcome the fact that the Farm Safety Partnership has brought together various stakeholders, including the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland, DARD, the UFU, NFU Mutual and the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster in an attempt to better coordinate the action that is necessary on this issue. As a body, it has built on the positive work carried out in recent years, at times often in isolation, by HSENI, and it has attempted to drive up on-farm safety and reduce work-related deaths and injuries. Certainly, the launch of the farm safety action plan is to be welcomed, and I look forward to receiving an update on its work.

The fact that farmers are now participating in awareness meetings organised by the partnership is a positive outcome. However, although we should continue this work, we need to explore how to reach those who have not attended the meetings. Raising awareness is key, and it is a vital part of what we hope to do. Other Members who spoke referred to the current television drive, which is hard-hitting. Investment needs to continue to make farmers and the general public aware of the relevant dangers.

As the motion highlights, there is an overriding need to make more money available to invest in farm safety across Northern Ireland. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development could, perhaps, make funding available for a farm safety investment scheme under axis 3 of the rural development programme. The benefits of such a scheme would be far-reaching. Practical examples have been explored today, but we could look at funding animal-handling facilities, safety applications for machinery and training to increase awareness and best practice. Given the continuing pressure on farm profitability and the continuing operational pressures that farm businesses in Northern Ireland face, that type of investment is imperative. We must ensure that lack of on-farm profitability does not render local farms and farmers at risk due to limited opportunities to invest in greater farm safety. To that end, I urge all Members to get behind the

motion, and I look forward to exploring the issue further in Committee.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to take this opportunity to speak in favour of the motion and support the comments made today about the importance of farm safety. The motion is timely. It comes ahead of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's planned review of farm safety and its meeting with the representatives of the Farm Safety Partnership, which is scheduled for the coming month.

All of us are aware of the dangers associated with farming and of the human consequences when accidents happen. As a councillor in Omagh District Council, I witnessed such tragedy when my party colleague, and former chairman of the council, Mickey McAnespie, tragically lost his life in a farming accident on the last day of April 2007.

I commend the excellent work that has been undertaken to date by the HSE and the Farm Safety Partnership in bringing a focus to the subject. Their Stay Farm Safe campaign, which advises farmers to think safe, has been highly successful, and the continuing work of the Be Aware Kids child safety campaign, which has included presentations to over 11,500 children in 100 rural primary schools, is to be highly commended.

I also want to acknowledge the role that DARD and DETI have played in the Farm Safety Partnership. Although the current action plan has a target date of 31 March 2014, it is important that a focus continues on farm safety beyond that date.

The HSE and the Ministers recognise that there is a culture of risk taking in the farming community. Therefore, any farm safety scheme must also target the mindset of farmers if we are to avoid tragedies. It is essential that we educate those involved in the industry of the potential dangers and force them to stop and think about their surroundings and the potential consequences of their actions. Although I support the call for a focus on farm safety, it is important to point out that a scheme in itself will not be sufficient to prevent people being killed or injured as a result of farming accidents.

In conclusion, I hope that today's discussion and the actions that will flow from it will help to prevent another injury or fatality on a farm. I support the motion.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion and the opportunity to highlight the widespread concern at the number of fatalities and injuries on farms. As a representative of a rural constituency, I am very aware of the dangers faced by farmers almost daily. Other representatives will be similarly aware of the high risk in the farmyard, and, indeed, some of that has been highlighted today. We have a responsibility to do everything we can to reduce that risk. It remains one of the most dangerous sectors in our economy. Up to 2012, the five-year average for fatal accidents per 100,000 people at risk was 11.7, compared to 0.8 per 100,000 for all employment in the North. It is a high-risk activity across the world, with a comparable figure of 11.1 in GB, 31 in the rest of the island and 30 in the USA and Germany. Across Europe, the figure stands at 12.

However, behind every figure is a human tragedy. Despite the many individual tragic incidents that we are all

aware of, we do not have a unique set of circumstances here in Northern Ireland. There were 19 work-related fatalities last year, and 11 of those were in the farming sector. In recognition of the ongoing problem, the Farm Safety Partnership was launched in May 2012. The original partners — the Health and Safety Executive, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ulster Farmers' Union — have since been joined by the National Farmers' Union Mutual, Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association. An action plan was produced and launched in November last year to run from September 2012 to March 2014, supported by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and, of course, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as the responsibility for health and safety rests with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. That action plan contained 44 specific actions and four key areas: the provision of information and the promotion of safe working; health and safety training; motivating good practice and discouraging poor practice; and the collection and analysis of information.

The purpose of the plan is to integrate managing safety into the business of farming, in part by emphasising the cost of not managing safety. The assessment appears to have been that changing the mindset around risk taking by farmers and those who work on the farm would be more effective than providing capital investment to make the processes of farming safe. That approach leaves farmers burdening the costs of achieving any targets for improving safety in the farming sector. Whether it is an accurate assessment or one driven by departmental budgetary concerns is a matter for debate. The absence of a fund for farm safety improvements has been raised as a point of concern in discussions during my time as Chair of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

One measure of the current action plan is the number of farmers engaged in the farm safety awareness campaign. The target is for 3,000 participants in the safety awareness sessions by March 2014. To date, two thirds of the way through the plan's timetable, just 1,000 have taken part. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development may have welcomed that as evidence of success. I suspect that maths may not, essentially, be her Department's strong point. It is not clear how many of those farmers who have engaged with the campaign have gone on to introduce safer processes and safer equipment. However, it would not be unreasonable for the Executive to provide assistance to farmers wishing to improve safety on their farm by at least part-funding the introduction of safety equipment.

There is an argument to say that it should be up to the Farm Safety Partnership to decide whether such a fund should be part of the action plan and that the Assembly should wait until the action plan for 2012-14 is completed before considering whether additional measures are needed. The question that the Assembly must answer today is whether to wait for the action plan to fail or to intervene now.

Mr McCallister: I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster.

Like many colleagues, particularly those representing large rural constituencies, I do not have far to go to recall families and friends touched by fatalities and injuries on

their farms. Before being elected to here, I farmed full time. I am aware of many of the issues that colleagues raised about the pressures of time, the workload and the stresses and strains.

It is stark when we look at and reflect on the figures, constantly reminding ourselves that behind all those figures are families facing difficulties, coping with horrendous events that usually took place right in their own farmyards, living with that and being there every day.

We should also look at other examples, and Mr McGlone rightly pointed out that this is not just a Northern Ireland problem. It is not even just a UK or Irish problem. It is a European problem and a world problem. We need to look at how a First World economy would respond to the challenges that that throws up. We took on board the tough messages of other industries and activities in our lives, asking how we could change behaviour. Traditionally, the construction industry was the most dangerous profession. Look at some of the changes that that industry went through and how seriously it now takes health and safety.

I say to the Minister that we need to raise the bar on health and safety. Do we need to look at further regulations or changes to legislation? I say to the Minister and her colleague Mrs Foster that I sense support and willingness in the House to look seriously at how we change mindsets in our farming sector. We cannot continue with the level of tragedy that we endured over the past number of years.

Road fatalities were significantly higher 20, 30 or 40 years ago. I accept that for families who lost a loved one on the roads, that is still one too many. However, look at the strides that were made in that area. Look at the difference that was made when all sectors got together and looked at car safety, car design, road design, how we make changes, driver awareness, and increasing driving test regulations. That is the sort of mindset change that we need to bring to the agriculture sector. We need to look at how all the people are pulled together.

That will require funding. It is regrettable that we do not have more movement on a farm safety fund. We need that to happen. We need to look at how we might do that or locate money from Europe. As I said, this is also a European problem, and Europe should be looking at it. We seem to get regulations from Europe about vibrations on tractors without worrying about all the other safety implications in farming. Europe would do better to look at farm safety and such issues rather than worrying about vibrations.

4.45 pm

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

Mr McCallister: We need to look at, for example, things that damage supporting roofs and power take-off (PTO) guards. I remind the Minister that we need a complete change of mindset on the issue.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Members opposite who tabled the motion. Agriculture is a major industry here, with nearly 50,000 people working on just over 24,000 farms. In recent years, significant changes have taken place. An increasing number of farms now have off-farm employment. Farm size is increasing, and the number of labour units is decreasing. An increasing number of farmers rely heavily on single

farm payments and other schemes. That is particularly true of dry stock farmers, especially hill men. Serious economic pressures mean that they have not been able to reinvest in new machinery and buildings, which, in itself, causes major safety problems. Despite the increasing use of technology and mechanisation in agriculture, farming is a labour-intensive and, sometimes, dangerous occupation. Farmers work in harsh weather conditions — sometimes, 24/7 — handle stock, operate large machinery and handle dangerous materials and chemicals.

In 2012-13, there were 11 deaths on farms. As we debate the motion, I am conscious of the many who are grieving having lost a loved one in a farm-related accident. Our thoughts are with them. In addition to those deaths, many farmers have had accidents on their farm. Some have made a full recovery; others have not and will live with a reminder of their accident for the rest of their days. The main causes of death and injury lie in the farmyard and buildings. The danger of working with slurry is well documented. When agitated or pumped, high amounts of hydrogen sulphide are released. Many tanks are around old houses. The farmer puts his stock out, but as the tank is usually under the cattle house, he has to go in to operate the machinery. Falling off a ladder or through a roof is also a killer. Farmers just do not have the financial capability to replace shed roofs that have corroded over the years. That had devastating consequences for farmers and their stock during the heavy snow earlier in the year.

With livestock, bulls are a primary concern. Animals with newborns also pose a risk. Farmers use stock-handling facilities that are, perhaps, 40 years old. Machinery deaths are frequent, caused by crushing or entanglement. PTO is a major cause of deaths and injuries. Farms are a high-risk environment for children and older people. A farmer uses an array of tools from chainsaws to welders. These are lethal if proper precautions are not taken. Of course, there are many fatalities as a result of using substandard or poorly maintained electrical equipment or catching overhead cables.

There are the occupational health issues associated with farming, which include lung disease, perhaps as a result of too many fusty bales of hay over the years or asbestos, and serious back pain as a result of poor lifting techniques. Coming from a farming family, I am only too aware of the dangers and the close shaves. What of the future? First, future farm modernisation schemes must have farm safety at their core. There is definitely a need to update electrical installations, and so on. I certainly acknowledge the work of the Farm Safety Partnership. The Stay Farm Safe awareness campaign is a great idea, but it must be readily available to more farmers. Focus farms are the vehicle of delivery. However, there are not enough focus farms, especially in my area, where there are very few on the hills. Farm safety needs to be promoted at every opportunity — in schools, markets and at agricultural and vintage shows. DARD must take the lead in developing comprehensive health and safety training for all farmers and farm workers. Last week, there was a very successful PTO shaft awareness week, but we really need a cross-departmental approach to an annual farm safety week.

In recent years, we have experienced urban renewal in cities and many towns. There are many examples of that in South Down, whether it be the streetscape or the fabric of buildings that has been improved as a result of

Executive funding. I believe that DARD needs to take the lead to utilise rural development moneys in a farm building improvement scheme in order to improve stock handling. Our winters are such that stock can no longer be out all winter, especially on the hills.

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

Mr Rogers: Research and development needs to be ongoing to ensure that every attempt is made to minimise death and injury on our farms.

In conclusion, our farming industry needs investment to ensure that its health and safety standards are comparable with those in other industries and, consequently, to ensure that it sees a reduction in death and injury on our farms.

Mr Dallat: Being probably the last contributor, I have had loads of time to reflect on my past. Although I spent most of my time as a teacher, I began my working life on a farm. My father was a farm labourer, and he brought me along to the farm. In no time at all, I discovered how to start the Grey Ferguson and began improving my trailer-reversing skills. That is the sort of culture there was. I have to say that that mostly happened when the farmer was away. This is a serious subject today, and I do not want to sound flippant, because I am very aware that many people looking in have lost loved ones.

Investment, I think, runs parallel and is synonymous with safety. Other industries, roads, building sites and, indeed, homes have all needed investment. I feel very privileged that I was introduced to the farm. I was not a farmer's son, but through that experience, I gained an immense amount of education in respecting the environment, appreciating animal welfare and all the other good things that farmers are responsible for. I certainly want to see that continuing. When the Minister is summing up, perhaps she will tell us whether she has had any discussions with CCEA, because I believe that there is a place in every subject taught in school to at least touch on and raise awareness of farm safety.

Some of our farms are open farms, and I do not want to see them becoming like building sites where there is a plethora of signs that say you are not allowed in. It is about striking a balance between allowing people to appreciate what is there and, at the same time, protecting them. That is what is necessary.

I see this really as a cross-departmental issue. I hope that the Minister of Agriculture has the support of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the other relevant Ministers who can make this a success.

I was told that the home is one of the most dangerous places to be, and I just want to mention in passing the novel idea of the hazard house in Ballymoney. Young people are brought to that dwelling to experience all the dangerous things in a home. I would love to see a hazard farm, not necessarily one covering 100 acres or anything like that, but a project, perhaps developed by the partnership, that would allow, particularly, young people and other farmers to come along to see the endless number of hazards that can exist on a farm. I have no doubt that that would contribute to saving lives.

This is an important subject for every Member of the House. Although we might wish to score political points occasionally, on this occasion, I hope that we are all

with the Minister in setting a pattern that will transform an industry that is so dear to all of us, whether or not we live on farms. If we do that, perhaps we will not have the tragedies that we have had in recent years, which have upset everybody, particularly the families and relatives affected. I hope that this debate will, in fact, provoke the development of a serious plan that involves investment to improve safety and, above all, to raise awareness of the subject. This is not a one-day wonder but something that needs to continue forever and a day.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who secured today's debate. I welcome the fact that we are having this discussion, because we all welcome anything that we can do to raise the profile of awareness on farms and farm safety. It goes without saying that I share the concerns that have been raised by all Members about the ongoing number of fatalities and injuries on farms and the need to improve safety standards on our farms so that they become safer places for farmers and their families. All Members have recognised that responsibility for the promotion of health and safety rests primarily with the Health and Safety Executive, but farm safety is a key area of importance and a priority for my Department as well. I am fully committed to the challenge of improving health and safety standards and am striving to reduce fatalities and injuries on our farms.

I fully support my Department's involvement in the Farm Safety Partnership along with the Health and Safety Executive and key stakeholders. I also fully support the farm safety action plan that has been agreed by the partnership. The action plan covers a wide range of actions that are aimed at improving awareness and safety standards on all farms. All the indications are that, although farmers are aware of the dangers that are posed, there is a culture of risk taking on farms. We really need to focus on that. It is about how we change that mindset and change the attitude to taking risks. We have a lot of work to do on that. The ongoing Think SAFE campaign is very important, particularly given the fact that there are so many children on farms. We really need to drive home that message. DARD has already taken a range of actions to improve awareness, change attitudes and generally help to improve safety on farms, and it will continue to do so. I am, of course, actively considering what more we can do to enhance the ongoing efforts.

A specific target for my Department in the farm safety action plan is to lead on the delivery of a health and safety awareness training course to 3,000 farmers and farm family members by 31 March next year. That is a challenging target, but I am absolutely committed to achieving it. Although uptake from the farming community has been slow, we are confident that the target can be achieved within the time frame set out. To date, over 1,000 farm family members have registered for the FarmSafe Awareness training sessions. To engage with more farm families, we are focusing on getting more established farming groups to register for the training sessions, which are available at 38 focus farms and at various community venues across the North.

In addition to promoting FarmSafe Awareness training at farming events, roadshows, farming conferences and meetings, my Department is taking actions to

encourage the uptake of the awareness training, including the distribution of 250 FarmSafe Awareness DVDs to community groups, churches and women's institutes; a specific FarmSafe Awareness session to rural support networks, young farmers' clubs and other rural community stakeholders; and distribution of a FarmSafe Awareness leaflet to 38,000 farming households. As a further encouragement to farmers to act on the messages that they learn at the training, attendees receive a self-risk assessment form. They are encouraged to be proactive and complete their own risk assessment shortly after the training concludes. Further work is continuing to improve that process and help farmers to make risk assessment a routine part of their daily working life.

The work of the Farm Safety Partnership is ongoing, and it is about to review the outcomes of its action plan. I will encourage the partnership to maintain its momentum and take forward that important challenge. Although a target date of 31 March next year has been set for the current action plan, we do not intend to stop there. We will look beyond that date, and I believe that consideration now needs to be given to what further steps can be taken to enhance training delivery and to encourage farmers to change their attitudes and behaviour with regard to farm safety. I will be guided by the Farm Safety Partnership, and I have asked my officials who are involved with the partnership to report to me on what further actions DARD can take to improve the understanding of farm safety issues in the industry and to develop and enhance the existing action plan. I am also exploring the potential to repeat the farms and farm families social survey to update me on information on non-fatal farm accidents and to help us to build up better information on farm safety awareness and training issues. As I have outlined, the Department is already doing a lot of work to help to ensure that farmers are better informed about safety on their farm. A key message to farmers has to be about thinking safe. Getting that message across will promote good practice and result in a reduced risk of accidents on farms.

5.00 pm

Capital funding from DARD is available under the existing rural development programme through the farm modernisation programme for items of plant, machinery and equipment that will contribute to the competitiveness of farm businesses by modernising holdings and improving production techniques. That is a small-scale grant programme with a maximum grant of about £4,000 for a farm business. Although the primary aim of the farm modernisation programme is to modernise farms, under the third tranche there are 37 items eligible for financial support that have the potential to directly enhance the safety of the working environment for farmers.

The items eligible for assistance in the scheme were drawn up in conjunction with industry stakeholders and with input from professional advisers from the Department and HSE. They include items such as cattle crushes, calving gates and sheep rollover crates that promote safer animal handling; cranes for handling bulk bags to reduce manual handling and improve the safety of transporting heavy loads; a range of fans to aid ventilation in farm buildings; and weed wipers, which help to reduce exposure to pesticides. Over the three tranches of the programme, £4.2 million of financial support for those safety-related items has been awarded in letters of offer to successful

applicants. That is obviously a good outcome that I will come back to a wee bit later.

Although the simplified format of the farm modernisation programme has proved popular, with over £10 million already paid to farm businesses, it is not possible in this format and in the time constraints of the existing rural development programme to accommodate larger structural capital items such as reroofing old farm buildings, installing outside mixing points for slurry tanks or even constructing permanent livestock handling facilities that may further enhance farm safety. I have, therefore, asked my officials to develop proposals for a scheme in the next rural development programme that would support larger capital investment to improve health and safety. DARD is currently consulting on the draft rural development programme, and I am pleased that that includes a proposal for a farm business investment scheme that would allow for much-needed investment in larger items, including those that will help to improve health and safety as part of farm competitiveness. That consultation is ongoing and will be open until 21 October. I obviously encourage individuals and organisations to submit their views on the proposed health and safety content of the new programme.

Subject to the responses to the consultation and to the agreement of the European Commission, the new RDP will incorporate the proposed farm business investment scheme. That has the potential to provide support to upgrade or replace buildings and equipment, including for health and safety; to improve animal husbandry and biosecurity; and to establish renewable energy technologies. That is a good prospect, and I hope that the scheme can be implemented as early as we would want. It is my intention to have the new capital support available very early in the new programme, not least given the importance that we attribute to addressing safety on farms. However, I am conscious that the new RDP provision remains some way off, and I am seized with the need to continue to support investment in farm safety equipment. So, I plan to extend the current tranche of the farm modernisation programme, subject to receiving the necessary funding. That will provide financial support for farm businesses that applied but just missed out under the first allocation of tranche 3 funding earlier this year. It will provide those applicants with an opportunity to access grant aid for items to help to modernise their farms. As I said, those include items that promote safer working practices on farms. So, once I know that the funding has been secured, I will be pleased to announce this extension to the scheme.

Of course, I emphasise that, as has been recognised here today, safety equipment is only one part of the solution. Recent tragic events only confirm my belief that health and safety practices must be incorporated into the day-to-day activities of the entire farm family so that there are real improvements in behaviour and attitudes to risky practices. We have already taken significant action to help improve the safety record on our farms and to reduce fatalities. However, I absolutely recognise that much more work is required by government authorities, stakeholder organisations and farmers themselves. Along with our partners in the Farm Safety Partnership, we will continue to engage fully with the review of the farm safety action plan and will consider what other actions can be taken forward. I will not be found wanting in bringing forward any support that my Department can give in the time ahead.

The message is clear: Think SAFE. Let us get a change in attitudes and put practical measures in place to assist farmers.

Mr Frew: I am heartened by the response that we have had to the motion today, not least the Minister's comments but also the fact that Members from every party — not just members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee or the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee — who come from a rural background or constituency have spoken well on the motion. I thank you all for being here and applaud you for contributing to the debate, which I believe to be a very important one. We all need to do more not just to save lives but to make sure that lives and livelihoods do not become broken. I am heartened by the response that we have had tonight.

I can compare the farming industry with one that I was steeped in for 20 years, which is the construction industry, which has been alluded to tonight. Over the past generation, mindsets and methods were forced to change in the construction industry. That is because the lowly apprentice spark was no longer allowed to stand on his toolbox to change a lamp; the brickie was not allowed to stand on a stepladder to form a row of bricks; and the plumber was not allowed to use a ladder to work at a high level. The symbols that everyone in this room visualises when the construction industry is mentioned are no longer used. On most sites nowadays, ladders and stepladders are banned, and you will hear the constant moan from artisans that common sense has been completely taken away from the construction industry. That could well be the case, but it is no less a feat because it has saved lives.

The onus has been taken away from the worker, and the responsibility has now been placed on the employer. If I go to do a job and cannot achieve it with the tools and machinery that I have, I put my hands up and ask someone to get me up to that height. I ask the builders to do something so that I can achieve the task safely. The onus was shifted from the person who held the tool to the person who employed them and the person who was running the job. Unfortunately, that cannot happen on the farm because it is only the farmer or the worker who are there. It is not his employer, and there will not be a health and safety manager about the farm as there is in the construction industry, so there are differences. However, there must be hope that we can change the mindset of the farmer.

It is a very lonely role in the farming community and the farming business. Most farmers nowadays do not have the capacity or the capital to employ people. It is usually just them or their family; their wife, daughter or son might work alongside them on the farm. There is a mindset that says, "This will not happen to me". People may think that something that happened last month was a tragedy and will not happen to them, but, in some cases, it does happen to them. That must stop. It is not just about deaths but serious injury or injuries that, in later life, have a devastating effect on that person's body in that they cannot cope or cannot work any more and they lose income and are in constant pain. It is about raising awareness; it is not just about throwing money at the problem. Throwing money at this will not solve everything. It will help, as long as the money is spent in the right areas, but it will not solve everything. There have to be awareness campaigns. There even has to be shock and trauma. We have seen the road

safety campaigns over the years, and we have seen it in the construction industry. There should be a shock/trauma element to make people think that they must stop certain practices and do certain things to prevent a serious injury happening to them or their loved ones. If we can do that, we can go some way to solving what is, in most cases, a tragedy in our homes and for our families.

I commend the work that this Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have done with the Farm Safety Partnership. The farmer, on his own, does not have an employer putting pressure on him to think safe, so it really is for the farmer or the Minister to do so. The Minister must rely on everybody in between, whether it be the Ulster Farmers' Union, NIAPA or any of the organisations that can assist in any shape or form. The Minister should rely on those bodies to come up with reassurance and assistance to help her in her task of raising awareness. It is true that the farm safety awareness programme has delivered locally on 37 focus farms with 1,000 farmers attending. That is good, but we must do better. We must hit that target of 3,000. We, in the Committee, will not be found wanting when it comes to helping the Minister to achieve that. Straight after this debate, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development hopes to do a mini review of farm safety, with, of course, the acceptance and support of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which has the primary responsibility for safety. We hope to undertake that very soon. Perhaps, in six months' time, we will have another debate on the same issue. It is so important.

Tom Buchanan proposed the motion. He mentioned the statistics, as did most Members who spoke. It is fair to say that the numbers are horrific. However, as many people said — John McCallister was one of them — when you look at each statistic and each life lost, there is a harrowing story to be told behind that. Families will never, ever recover. They will have to step out their doors and see where their loved one perished. They will recount and relive that moment over and over again. Not only that; those families are under severe pressure every day to earn a living because they have lost their loved one. We must support that and be aware of that when we sit in this Building.

Ian Milne welcomed the opportunity to speak in this important debate. He supported the motion. He said that there needs to be a will on everyone. I agree 100% with that: everyone must take responsibility to make it better. Joe Byrne, the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, talked about the various schemes out there and the stats. He talked about the programmes that could be put in place when buying machinery or using certain materials. That is a very good point. As I said, health and safety on the building site and in the construction industry became an industry on its own. People saw that they could make great money from safety equipment. That is OK, but, if they would concentrate more on farm machinery, we could save lives. I do not care who makes money from the issue so long as we save lives. That should be the most important thing.

Sandra Overend talked about the suffering that families go through, the legacy left behind, the hurt and the pain and the remembrance. She said that prevention is always better than cure, and she urged the Minister to explore all funding opportunities, even from Europe.

I am running out of time. I urge the Minister to do all she can to draw down funding from Europe for this very serious and important issue. I support all her moves on farm modernisation. However, £4,000 of a ceiling is only a drop in the ocean when it comes to modernisation. It is not all about making profits and making your farm modern to make profits. It is also about safety, raising awareness and saving lives. Four thousand pounds just will not cut it.

We need to do something to extend that to make real differences to people's sheds, people's barns and people's roofs so that they do not have to go up onto the roofs to fall off them or be knocked down by the weather. Minister, I will assist you in any way that I can to support you in your efforts over the next couple of months and years on the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the number of fatalities and injuries on farms; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to build upon the good work of the Farm Safety Partnership by, as a matter of urgency, providing adequate funding for a farm safety investment scheme to help protect people working on farms and encourage real and practical investment in farm safety.

5.15 pm

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Newry Southern Relief Road

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who speak will have seven minutes.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I tender apologies from my colleague from Newry and Armagh Megan Fearon, who has another engagement. I welcome the Minister and thank him for being here. I welcome the announcement that he made on 27 September of £1.6 million for additional resurfacing in the Newry area. That is very welcome. Bessbrook has not been mentioned, but I am sure that it will get part of that.

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

The 'Banbridge/Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015' includes a proposal for a Newry southern bypass as a long-term strategic road improvement to link from the A1 Dublin Road, a key strategic road, to the A2 Warrenpoint Road, a trunk road heading to Warrenpoint port. The Department's consultation document on proposals to expand the 'Regional Strategic Transport Network Plan 2015' includes the Newry southern relief road as a scheme that performed well in assessment. After representations, the Department agreed to undertake a local transport study of the southern side of Newry to assess the impact of the southern relief road and the possible lines of a new link from the A1 Dublin Road at or in the vicinity of Cloughoge roundabout.

In October 2006, Roads Service engaged consultancy support to assist its southern division to undertake a transportation study to assess a range of road improvement options to provide relief to traffic in the Dublin Road, Bridge Street, William Street, Abbey Way and Warrenpoint Road area of the city of Newry. That work included a review and assessment of the possibility of options to provide a new road link from the A2 Warrenpoint Road to the A1 Dublin Road, establishing the potential benefits, costs and impacts of a new road link. I am sure that anyone who has driven through Newry, particularly in Dublin Road, Bridge Street, Dominic Street and the Ballybot area in general will immediately recognise particular problems in that area. Two years ago, I asked road traffic management to do a survey of traffic use on Dominic Street, which is a relatively small street in Newry. It was found that 5,000 vehicles a day use that road, and that is a lot of traffic for a street that was not built for it.

The feasibility study report published in 2009 concluded that, on the basis of the information available and presented in the report, the provision of a new road link between the A2 Warrenpoint and the A1 Belfast-Dublin key transport corridor was feasible and would be expected to provide significant economic benefits. That report also recommended that all options be taken through a wider consultation process to explore and assess the wider benefits with key stakeholders in the area. At the presentation of the report at a meeting of Newry and Mourne District Council in September 2009,

when the current Minister was possibly still a councillor — I think he was — Minister Conor Murphy welcomed the findings of the feasibility study into the Newry southern relief road. The Minister said:

"I welcome the positive findings of the report on the feasibility of the scheme and the transport benefits that a new road link, between the A2 Warrenpoint Road dual carriageway and the A1 Belfast/Dublin Key Transport Corridor, would bring to this area. This scheme would provide a new strategic transport link to support the economic growth of the city, improve transport links to Warrenpoint Harbour, increase road safety and contribute to a reduction in congestion within the centre of Newry. The report takes account of traffic demands on the main road network, in the southern part of Newry city centre, together with the constraints presented by existing development, the challenging topography and sensitive environment of the area."

On that basis, the Minister asked Roads Service to proceed with further environmental and engineering assessments and to engage in a wider consultation process considered necessary to identify a preferred corridor for the Newry southern relief road.

The feasibility study prepared for Roads Service by consultants Scott Wilson provided a comprehensive assessment in which options for providing a strategic road link between the A2 Warrenpoint Road dual carriageway and the A1 Dublin key transport corridor were developed and costed. Several environmental and technical issues require further attention. There is the Carlingford shore special area of conservation in the south and the Carlingford special protection area in the north. Environmental issues associated with tree ring features on the slopes of Fathom Mountain and with crossing Newry canal require detailed investigation. I will point out that Newry canal, which was opened in 1742, is the oldest inland waterway in Ireland or Britain. I just thought I would put that in for posterity.

The need for the road becomes increasingly urgent. In 2012, DOE confirmed that air quality at Trevor Hill and Canal Street was the worst in the North. At that time, DRD, under the present Minister, said that the southern relief road project's development was dictated by numerous factors, not just air quality. Air quality is one of a number of environmental factors considered at each stage in the development and assessment of a major road improvement scheme. DRD said that, in particular, the benefits identified in the scheme include an alternative route for heavy goods vehicles travelling to and from Warrenpoint port and a regional gateway to the A1 Belfast/Dublin dual carriageway, avoiding the congested urban network in the city of Newry. A southern relief road would be expected to provide a measure of relief to the Dublin Road, Bridge Street, Abbey Way and the Warrenpoint Road area of Newry.

Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade has said that delivery of the road would bring numerous benefits to the greater Newry area. A southern relief road will not only alleviate traffic congestion but have other financial spin-offs, including providing alternative access routes for the Albert Basin, increasing its development potential, freeing up land for development at the Greenbank estate and opening up tourist links between County Down, County

Louth and south Armagh, as well as reducing emergency service vehicle response times and reducing air pollution in Newry city centre.

The Minister also represents our constituency of Newry and Armagh, and I urge him to take on board what I have said. I truly appreciate that he has a limited budget and many priorities. However, there is nothing wrong with being parochial sometimes, and I am sure that I have spotted the Minister going to Omeath for cheaper diesel. He can correct me if I am wrong. As I said, there is nothing wrong with being parochial sometimes, and there is no doubt that a southern relief road would bring great benefit to our constituency.

Mr Wells: I support the call for a southern relief road in Newry. I frequently travel from Kilkeel to Banbridge, and I would not like to add up the hours that I have spent waiting in Kilmorey Street, waiting to cross the bridge into Newry or waiting to go through to the Quays shopping centre. It is the ultimate bottleneck.

To be fair to the Department, Newry has received some good road infrastructure news in recent years. The dual carriageway that links the Banbridge dual carriageway with the motorway that starts at Dundalk was completed, and that has greatly speeded up travel on that side of town. There has also been some progress on the Narrow Water bridge project, although we do not know exactly where we stand. First, that bridge is far from certain, and, secondly, even if it were built, it would not relieve much of the traffic that we are dealing with. It would certainly not relieve the large number of juggernauts coming through from Warrenpoint harbour.

One of the great successes of south Down is that, throughout the recession, Warrenpoint harbour has prospered. It has met great challenges, has overcome them, is in profit and is doing well. It is a fulcrum of economic development in that part of south Down. Its chief executive tells me that it is very frustrating for him that large lorries coming from Warrenpoint have difficulty accessing the port and getting away from it, particularly to markets in the Irish Republic and in the Belfast area. One is very mindful of the fact that, when you stand close to the Irish-language primary school — the nearest point, I suppose — you can see lorries spewing out fumes and getting absolutely nowhere. Not only is that an expense to the harbour authority and those who take consignments to and from it but it is leading to a reduction in air quality.

Over the years, I have asked the Minister to bring me up to date on the cost of the scheme. I think that the last figure he quoted was between £150 million and £200 million. I have no doubt that, today, he will bring us right up to date on the exact figure. Everyone must accept that that is a huge amount — there is no question about that — but I ask him to check a couple of funding possibilities. First, is there any way that cross-border EU moneys could be obtained? I accept that the scheme would link, dare I say it, one part of the United Kingdom with another part of the United Kingdom, in the sense that it would not transgress into the Irish Republic. However, being serious about it, I think that it could be argued that it would be a very important cross-border development. Obviously, a lot of the traffic to and from the southern part of Newry is going into the Irish Republic. Therefore, there may be merit in trying to access European money, though I know that that is difficult. Secondly, if I may be the first to mention the elephant in the room, the A5 is on hold. That was a £400

million scheme, and I understand that there is still money in the kitty allocated for that. There may be a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, as it were, that could be used to start the scheme. I accept that it is expensive, but the cost would be spread over quite a few years. Thirdly, I wonder whether, when the economic conditions improve, a joint venture between us and the Irish Republic would be possible. Undoubtedly, this would bring great economic benefits to traffic coming from the Republic as well as from Northern Ireland. Those are the various models.

Some have suggested that there could be a toll bridge. Experience shows that it is highly unlikely that any private investor would build this massive project with any realistic prospect of redeeming the cost through tolls. We all know the success of toll bridges in parts of the Republic's motorway system. However, it is noticeable that, in other parts, where the traffic projections were clearly wrong, the Irish Government now pay money to private contractors to make up the shortfall. The only successful ones are at the Boyne and on the Dublin ring road; the rest lose money. I cannot honestly see how anyone could redeem such a huge amount through tolling. However, if the Minister has a crystal ball and can advise me otherwise, I would be very interested. People would not pay a toll; they would simply continue to congest that very busy part of Newry.

It is important to keep this up to date. The area plan recognises that we need it. Frankly, I see it as the last piece in the jigsaw of Newry's development. I hark on about this, but I used to say that I was elected before some people in the room were born. Looking around, I do not think that that is the case today — Mr McCallister may claim otherwise, but I doubt it — but I recall that, when I was first elected in 1982, Newry was in South Down. It is not untrue to say that there was practically sagebrush blowing down the main street. The town was a basket case economically. As a result of the work of people such as Mr Haughey and Gerard O'Hare, Newry has been pulled up by the bootstraps, and its economic output has increased enormously. That is a remarkable testimony to indigenous entrepreneurs working hard to revive their economy. Having done that, Newry deserves support, and the southern relief road would be the last piece in the jigsaw of its ultimate regeneration. Of course, there is also the canal basin redevelopment, which really would make Newry an exemplar to the rest of the country for what can be done.

I support what Mr Brady is saying and am sure that others will join me in that. I have my doubts about whether the Minister will announce today that he is about to cut the first sod or is planning the cutting of the ribbon. It may be slightly further off than that. However, I would like to think that, as a result of today's debate, he can give us an indication that progress is being made on achieving this much-needed project.

5.30 pm

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht seo ar bhóthar faoisimh theas an Iúir. I am glad of the opportunity to participate in today's debate on the southern relief road at Newry. At the outset, I state that the SDLP strongly supports the provision of the road. Indeed, I raised the issue with the previous Minister several times in the House and just last year during the debate on the investment strategy.

Our party locally has conducted a vigorous postcard and petition campaign in support of the road. The Members who spoke highlighted the importance of the project for tourism and for the economy, and I very much agree with that. The project will benefit south Armagh, the city of Newry and south Down. The traffic congestion in Newry is a problem, especially with huge lorries coming to and from the harbour at Warrenpoint. That traffic congestion creates a problem and puts people off coming to shop and to do business in Newry. The project is supported by the greater Newry vision group, and I think that all parties represented here have signed up to that greater vision. The Minister, as a local representative, will be aware that the proposal is well supported in the business community and the wider community in the greater Newry area.

The road can be constructed in a way that respects the built heritage and natural environment of the area. Mr Wells referred to the importance that the road will have to the harbour at Warrenpoint. It is a busy harbour, and, as I said, there is much traffic to and from it. The road would add to the competitiveness of Warrenpoint harbour, in so far as it will increase access and egress times from the harbour and, therefore, make it more competitive in relation to other similar harbours North and South. The relief road would be a key strategic road for future economic and tourism development in the region and, indeed, the whole east coast of Ireland.

I assume that the Minister will tell us that the feasibility study report, which was published in August 2009, concluded that the provision of the new road between the A2 Warrenpoint Road and the A1 dual carriageway is feasible and would be expected to provide significant economic benefits. That was one of the significant outcomes of the feasibility study.

The Department for Regional Development's strategic transport network plan has included proposals for the Newry southern relief road. As we know, Newry has a proud history at the heart of the island's economy, and Mr Wells outlined how local people — some of whom he mentioned in his speech — were instrumental in advancing the economic viability of Newry and making it into a prosperous city. I will mention the contribution made by a local co-op with Work in Newry (WIN). Having viewed the dire unemployment figures and economic prospects, that group was instrumental in ensuring that the economy of Newry was revived and that the city became a vibrant force once again.

That group and other local groups are very much in support of the project. I hope that the Minister can give us an update on a preferred route for the road and tell us when he expects to announce that. I also hope that the Minister is lobbying among his Executive colleagues to obtain the necessary support for the project. It would be good if the Minister were in a position to tell us when some sort of announcement will be made about the future of the road. As I said, there is tremendous support for the project in the city of Newry, south Down and south Armagh, and I think that it is one that deserves the type of resources needed to bring it forward. I hope that it will become a reality in the not-too-distant future.

Mr Rogers: I support the motion. The draft 'Banbridge/Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015' includes a proposal for the Newry southern relief road to link the A1 Belfast to Dublin road with the A2 Warrenpoint Road. Although the scheme has performed well in the DRD's assessment, it

has been deemed not affordable at the moment. Minister, I do not whether this is take two or take three, but we have sat on opposite sides of Newry and Mourne District Council discussing the issue in the past. It was important then, and it is even more important today.

As other Members have said, the creation of such a road would have significant economic benefits for the whole south Down, south Armagh and Newry area. Narrow Water bridge is merely a tourist bridge, but the relief road would take heavy goods vehicles off the streets of Newry, reduce traffic congestion and attract even more shoppers to the city. Heavy goods vehicles would also have a direct route to Warrenpoint port, increasing trade in the port area. Warrenpoint port currently ranks third in Northern Ireland, significantly behind two other east coast ports. As Mr Wells said, Warrenpoint Harbour Authority has ambitious plans for the development of the port, including its becoming a visiting destination for cruise liners next year.

The road would also act as a gateway to the development of tourism in south Down. There are ambitious plans for the development of Warrenpoint, Kilkeel and Newcastle as part of a south-east-coast master plan. However, we must get people to turn off the main A1 and into Mourne country and St Patrick's country. There also great potential with the development of the Cooley and Slieve Gullion tourism area.

We see similar schemes when we travel around Ireland, England and the rest of Europe. I listened to Mr Brady say that we had the engineers, and so on, around to construct Newry canal in 1742. What is holding us up today? Where there is a will, there is a way. I hope that Mr Kennedy, along with his Executive colleagues, finds that will.

Mr McCallister: Colleagues present are conveniently all from the constituencies of South Down and Newry and Armagh, so I do not expect the Minister to announce anything but good news. I always get a bit anxious and worried when Mr Wells reminds us that he was elected in 1982. It is high time that he was retired, but, thankfully, he still has had a contribution to make in the past few years. I agree with some of what he said about Newry.

I do not live that far from Newry. The changes that have happened there over the past 25 or 30 years are enormous. The city's regeneration and vibrancy, the drive of the Newry business community despite some very difficult times, and the enthusiasm of different groups in the city are all to be commended.

As with other major towns and cities, one of the hugely limiting factors in Newry is congestion. Travelling into, or parking in, the city has become so difficult that it could start to stifle business there. Travelling into and around Newry is very difficult at times, particularly for those coming from the Warrenpoint side. The traffic also has a detrimental effect on the potential growth of the harbour at Warrenpoint. We should be mindful of that, because the port is an economic driver there. It is hugely important to the south Down economy, as well as to the wider Northern Ireland economy, as the trade that goes through the port is vital to us. The southern relief road would have a huge impact and bring advantages for both Newry city, in relieving congestion there, and Warrenpoint port. It could make a huge contribution.

I know that the Minister has visited Warrenpoint harbour on numerous occasions and will be familiar with it. We will have to bear that in mind, along with all the other things

that a project such as this could do for south Down and the wider Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not want to disappoint him, but although I have been around this Building for a very long time, I started very young, and I am certainly nowhere near retirement age.

The Member and I have both attended meetings in Warrenpoint where Newry and Mourne District Council has unveiled exciting proposals for cruise liners to be brought into Warrenpoint. The water depth is sufficient, and I know that the harbour authority is very up to it. However, does the Member accept that it will be very off-putting if we bring lots of wealthy tourists into south Down and then when we try to take them anywhere beyond that immediate area, they will get logjammed in Newry in their bus going absolutely nowhere?

Mr McCallister: I agree with that.

The only reason why the Member is not so near retirement age is because the Government keep moving it.

I agree with the serious point that he made. I think that bringing that type of tourism into Northern Ireland and south Down would be hugely beneficial. I remind him of the successes that there have been in Belfast with bringing in cruise ships. That is having a huge impact, and it is something that I would like to see and encourage in south Down. It could have a huge impact and be very valuable for the economy, both locally and in the entire surrounding area. The impact that it would have across the board on business would be enormous. So, it is a project to which we are all very committed.

I look forward with great interest to what the Minister has to say. He may perhaps shed some light on whether, at this stage, he has spent the A5 money about 10 times over. Certainly, he will have had demands for it to be spent. Does he still have the A5 money, or has it gone back to DFP? We might need to make sure that Simon Hamilton is as enthusiastic about the southern relief road as I expect the Minister to be.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Members who have remained for this important debate.

One of the consequences of attending the debate is that I will not be available for the opening of Markethill Livestock and Farm Sales in my constituency this evening. However, I take the opportunity to place on record my congratulations to Mr Hampton Hewitt and everyone concerned. I wish them well in that relocation, given the importance of that business to the local economy in mid-Armagh and further afield.

I asked my officials to take note of issues so that if I do not have time to pick up any of the points that Members raised, I can write to them following the debate. I have, of course, listened with care to Members' comments, and it will come as no surprise at all to you to hear that I am a very strong supporter of the southern relief road and project.

I am very familiar with the peak-time traffic conditions in the city of Newry, especially on Kilmorey Street, William Street, Bridge Street and Dublin Road in the southern part of the city. I also understand the benefits that a southern relief road might be expected to provide.

The expanded strategic road improvement (SRI programme) makes specific reference to the Newry southern relief road in a list of schemes that performed well in the assessment but that were not affordable in the investment strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) budget to 2015. I inherited the situation in which only a feasibility study had been undertaken, albeit that the findings were positive, as we expected.

As Members recall, the study assessed a range of options for a new road link between the key strategic A1 Belfast to the border dual carriageway and the A2 Warrenpoint Road dual carriageway, which is a trunk road leading to Warrenpoint harbour. Much has been made of the need for improvements to that road for the harbour traffic, and I accept that entirely.

The study took account of the Government's five main objectives for transport: environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration. The report concluded that a southern relief road would be feasible; would create a more strategically connected road network; would provide a measure of relief to traffic in the city; and could be expected to demonstrate value for money. At that time, construction costs in the range of between £100 million and £211 million were indicated. That remains the case. Those costs reflect the challenges presented by the topography and constraints of the area through which the proposed road would pass. That area includes the Newry river and canal, which was opened in 1742. If you wait a moment or two, you will hear me going back slightly further than that. It also includes the steep slopes of Fathom Mountain, the Belfast/Dublin railway line and the environmentally sensitive areas in Carlingford lough, which are downstream of the location.

5.45 pm

Traffic surveys undertaken in 2007 indicated traffic levels in excess of 24,000 vehicles per day on parts of Bridge Street. That included a significant proportion of heavy goods vehicles travelling to or from Belfast and Dublin to the port at Warrenpoint. Also, at that time, Newry traders were benefiting from visitors from the Republic of Ireland who were attracted to shop in the city by the relative currency values. Peak traffic demands in excess of the available road capacity led to delays and congestion on the local and strategic road network. Although we no longer have the same volume of southern shoppers, peak demand continues to exceed capacity. In that respect, the feasibility report concluded that the provision of an alternative route for strategic traffic would create a more strategically connected road network, while providing a measure of relief to traffic on the Dublin Road, Bridge Street, William Street, Abbey Way and Warrenpoint Road areas of the city of Newry. The report went on to make clear, however, that it should be recognised that the significant volumes of local traffic would continue to create delays and congestion in the city, particularly during the morning and afternoon peak periods.

Recognising Warrenpoint harbour as a key stakeholder for the Newry southern relief road, the feasibility report also concluded that significant disruption was experienced by heavy goods vehicles going to and from the port, which pass through the city of Newry, and that the provision of a new road would create an alternative route for that traffic and provide relief to traffic delays and congestion.

I am also aware that the feasibility report noted that the future expansion of the port was largely influenced by the efficiency of the transport links to and from the port.

The traffic modelling reported in the feasibility study indicated that over 5,000 vehicles per day may be attracted to a southern relief road, with more than 22,000 continuing to use Bridge Street. Nevertheless, the traffic and economic assessments that have been undertaken indicate that the proposed scheme would be expected to provide value for money with transport benefits, including safety benefits, exceeding the costs involved in providing the relief road.

The feasibility study recommended consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and identified the need to undertake an article 6 assessment under the terms of the European Union's habitats directive. That assessment would test the likely significance of the proposed scheme on the two Natura 2000 sites within the wider study area; namely, the Carlingford shore special area of conservation in the Republic of Ireland and the Carlingford lough special protection area in Northern Ireland. I can confirm that that has been progressed.

This is quite technical, but it is very important. Environmental issues associated with tree ring features on the slopes of Fathom Mountain, which is likely to be affected by the proposal, are the subject of a more detailed investigation, which includes consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). I am advised that NIEA believes those features to be potentially significant early 17th-century sconces, rather than the more recent tree ring landscape features. I need hardly remind Members of what sconces are, but they are rudimentary artillery fortifications comprising small circular earthen banks. They date back to November 1600 and the latter stage of the nine-year war of 1594 to 1603, which involved hostilities between the High King of Ireland, Hugh O'Neill, and the forces of Baron Mountjoy. Of course, Members will be very familiar with all that.

Should the NIEA assessment prove correct, this would represent a category of site that has not been previously identified in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, my Department is continuing to work with the NIEA with a view to determining conclusively the precise origins of those features. A solution is likely to come at some cost whether the site is excavated and recorded by archaeologists or the line of the proposed road is moved.

A more detailed technical investigation of the specific options for crossing the Newry canal was also recommended, given the sensitive nature of this important heritage feature. It is expected to require at least the provision of a bascule, or lifting bridge, to allow the passage of tall ships on the canal. The width of the Victoria lock already limits the size of ship that can enter the canal and it is expected that any bridge would maintain a navigation channel that matches the width of the sea lock. My Department will continue to consult with NIEA on how the impact of the proposal on the canal might be mitigated and an appropriate design developed.

Future progress remains dependent on a number of factors, including the development process and the proposal clearing the statutory procedures, which will involve formal public consultation. It must continue to have a satisfactory economic appraisal and, given other

competing priorities, progress to construction will be dependent on the funding made available in future Budget settlements.

Members will know that I am a strong supporter of this project. I have asked officials to move the scheme forward and proceed with the various environmental and technical investigations relating to the tree ring features on Fathom Mountain and Newry canal, which will assist in identifying a preferred corridor for the Newry southern relief road.

I welcome all the contributions to the debate. Mickey Brady set out the case. Jim Wells mentioned the importance of the harbour authority and other funding opportunities including from the EU and from tolls. All those things will be explored. Dominic Bradley and Sean Rogers expressed strong support for the proposal. Road building is a lengthy and detailed process. John McCallister recognised the economic driver of Warrenpoint port. There is substantial political support, and I know that there is substantial community and business support for the road. There are technical issues, which are important environmentally and otherwise. We will continue to progress the matter as quickly as possible.

Adjourned at 5.53 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 1 October 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Kieran McCarthy replace Mr Stewart Dickson as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mr Stewart Dickson replace Mrs Judith Cochrane as a member of the Committee for Social Development; that Mr Trevor Lunn replace Mr Kieran McCarthy as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; that Mr Trevor Lunn replace Mr Stewart Dickson as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; and that Mr Kieran McCarthy replace Mr Chris Lyttle as a member of the Committee on Procedures. — [Mr McCarthy.]

Executive Committee Business

Local Government Bill: Second Stage

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

That the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill [NIA 28/11-15] be agreed.

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I would like to thank my Executive colleagues for their support in bringing this Bill to the Assembly. We have a once-in-a-political-lifetime opportunity to shape the future of local government so that it delivers improved outcomes for everyone. My key priority is to continue the important work that was taken forward by my predecessor Alex Attwood, which built on the extensive programme started in the previous Assembly mandate.

I want to acknowledge the commitment of everyone, including elected representatives, local government officers and departmental officials, whose direct involvement has enabled us to reach this significant stage. In addition to developing the policies to be given effect by this Bill, a major reform programme is being delivered through the structures that were put in place by my predecessor.

Councils and councillors have a key role to play in addressing issues that affect the lives and the life experiences of all our people. The Executive's vision is one of strong, dynamic local government, creating communities that are vibrant, health, prosperous, safe and sustainable and that have the needs of all their citizens at their core. Councillors play a unique role in delivering that vision by linking the delivery of services with local people's needs and ambitions. Working together, they have a clear role in providing strong civic leadership and acting as a consistent advocate for their area.

The Local Government Bill provides the legislative framework necessary to give effect to the Executive's decisions on the future shape and function of local government. The provisions are comprehensive and will impact on all aspects of the operations of the new councils. Taken together, they represent the most significant shake-up of our system of local government in over 40 years.

Before I go into some detail on the Bill's provisions, I want to say a few words about what is not included. The Bill does not provide for the operation and functions of the new councils during the shadow period. That will be provided by way of a programme of subordinate legislation using enabling provisions of the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and the Local Government

(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, and the power to make supplementary and transitional provision conferred by clause 123 of this Bill. It is my intention that all the necessary regulations will be made before the local government elections take place in May 2014. Elections are an excepted matter, so the Secretary of State will make the necessary legislation to provide for the terms of office of existing councillors to be extended until 1 April 2015 and for cooption arrangements to continue until 1 January in that year.

The Local Government Bill has 128 clauses, 16 Parts and 12 schedules. It introduces strong, modern statutory governance arrangements that will provide for proportionality in the allocation of positions of responsibility and protections for the interests of minority communities, and it will improve the transparency in the operation of councils and their business. It will establish an ethical standards regime, which is to include a mandatory local government code of conduct for councillors and others appointed to take part in council business. The code will be supported by mechanisms for the investigation and adjudication of alleged breaches of the code. A bar will be placed on those holding a publicly elected representative position from being elected or acting as a councillor, in order to end the dual mandate.

The Bill will also introduce council-led community planning to provide a statutory framework for councils to work in conjunction with other public sector service providers to deliver on our objective of improving outcomes for everyone. The delivery of community planning will be supported at council level by the introduction of an updated performance improvement framework that focuses on the delivery of continuous improvement in service delivery against more strategic aspects. It will also be supported by the introduction of a general power of competence for councils, which will enable them to act more innovatively in addressing issues. Recognising that the various Departments will continue to have responsibility for the delivery of a wide range of services and retain the overall policy responsibility for functions and responsibilities transferring to councils, the Bill will establish a partnership panel between Executive Ministers and elected representatives for the new councils.

The reorganisation of the councils and the transfer of functions from Departments to councils will result in the transfer of staff, assets and liabilities to the new councils from existing councils, from other local government bodies, and from Departments and other organisations that are transferring functions to the new councils. The Bill makes provision for the development of schemes to effect those transfers. Those relating to staff will provide for the protection of contractual employment rights and of terms and conditions of service and pensions, and will apply statutory protections, including those enshrined in the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE).

Linked to the transfer of functions from Departments, the Bill will extend to all Departments the supervision powers that are available to my Department.

The opportunity is taken in the Bill to address a small number of technical issues, including those necessary to reflect the current organisational structure of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Part 1 deals with councils as entities, specifying how the names are to be formed, and provides a mechanism for the name of a council to be altered. It also introduces the first aspect of the arrangements to enhance openness and transparency in the operation of councils by requiring each to publish a constitution. A council's constitution will set out how it operates in terms of its political governance structure and organisational structure and how decisions are reached, including details of those decisions devolved to council officers. It will also provide a single reference source for the range of procedures and codes of practice that govern a council's operation.

Councils are, of course, made up of elected representatives, and Part 2 and schedules 1 and 2 set out the requirements for an individual to be elected or to be a councillor, unless they are disqualified by virtue of specified conditions. In relation to the disqualification conditions, I am taking the opportunity in the Bill, with the agreement of my Executive colleagues, to place a bar on MLAs, MPs and MEPs from being councillors. I am also removing, for human rights purposes, the blanket bar on council employees being councillors. The ban will continue to apply to those officers who are in positions in which they work directly with and provide advice to a council or one of its committees.

As I stated, there will be a mandatory Northern Ireland local government code of conduct for councillors as part of the new ethical standards regime. Currently, councillors are required to sign a declaration of acceptance of office before sitting as a councillor. The Bill will amend that declaration to state also that they have read and:

"will observe the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors in the performance of their functions".

A similar declaration will be required to be made by others appointed to take part in council business — for example, members of committees of councils — prior to sitting on that committee.

Although a number of councils have arrangements for the sharing of power, I am committed to ensuring that the sharing of power and responsibility is the cornerstone of the new councils. Recent experience in the formation of some statutory transition committees highlighted and reinforced the absolute need for these new arrangements. Through Part 3 and schedule 3, the new councils will have a choice of methods to achieve that. Those include the d'Hondt process, with which we are all familiar; the Sainte-Laguë approach, which is similar to d'Hondt in that it uses a formula to allocate positions to political parties based on their level of representation on a council and the number of positions already allocated to a party; and the single transferable vote.

The d'Hondt process is the default position if the parties on a council cannot agree a method. To ensure consistency in the application of the alternatives, the operation of each is specified in the Bill. I am indebted to, and wish to thank, the members of the policy development panel who formulated the proposals. The panel comprised representatives of the five political parties represented in the Executive, and the provisions we will debate today are a testament to their work.

Some Members will say that the use of a formula-based approach favours political parties with higher levels of representation on a council to the disadvantage of those with lower levels of representation, and independents. I acknowledge that, which is why the method selected by a council will be applied at the start of a council term, following a local government election, for all the positions to which it will apply. The selection of a position of responsibility, and the year for which it will be held, will be a matter for the selecting political party to determine. In other words, as the process is being run, a political party may, if the position has not already been taken, select the position of a particular committee in year 3 of the council's term. The adoption of this approach should provide the opportunity for elected representatives from all political parties and independents to hold a chairperson or vice-chairperson position, whether that is of the council or one of its committees. I believe that that will go a significant way towards mitigating the drawbacks of a formula-based approach.

10.45 am

Members who serve or have served on a council will know that its range of responsibilities and functions is such that it is unrealistic to expect it to discharge all of them at its monthly meetings. Part 4 enables a council to arrange for its functions, other than the making of the district rate or the borrowing, acquiring or disposing of land, to be carried out by a committee, subcommittee or officer of the council. Councils are also able to establish a committee jointly with one or more councils to discharge a function if they consider that to be appropriate and beneficial. The provisions are a re-enactment of those contained in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, with the modifications necessary to cater for the alternative new political governance arrangements that are to be available to the new councils.

Part 4 and schedule 5 also add to my commitment to the sharing of power and responsibility by putting in place arrangements to ensure that the membership of council committees reflects, as far as is practicable, the political make-up of a council, as the House does for its Committees.

The reorganisation of local government, the transfer of functions and responsibilities to the new councils from Departments and the provision of brand new powers and responsibilities will have a significant impact on the work of councils. As I have just indicated, to support the councils in the delivery of their responsibilities and respond to changing circumstances as effectively as possible, I am introducing a small number of alternative political governance arrangements. They are set out in Part 5 and include the committee system, which is currently operated by all but one of the councils, and executive arrangements under which certain functions of the council will be devolved to the executive, which will be responsible for decisions on the delivery of those functions within a policy and budgetary framework agreed by the council. I am also including a mechanism to enable a council, at any stage, to propose an alternative to the methods specified for consideration.

A council that chooses to adopt executive arrangements may establish a single committee or more than one committee of the council to be responsible for the devolved

functions. The latter option would allow a council to share direct responsibility for decision-making across a wider range of members. The introduction of executive arrangements does not do away with a council's need to form committees to discharge functions because a range of functions, including those of a regulatory nature, such as licensing, will remain the responsibility of the council. Part 6 provides the enabling power for my Department to specify which functions will or may be the responsibility of an executive. It also sets out the arrangements that an executive may put in place to discharge its functions, including by a subcommittee, an officer, or jointly with one or more other councils.

Some Members may question devolving decision-making to a small number of councillors without the requirement for ratification by the council and the opportunity that this would provide for further consideration of a matter. That is why Part 6, in addition to setting out how an executive will operate, requires a council that adopts executive arrangements to establish one or more overview and scrutiny committees. Those committees will have the power to review or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken under executive arrangements or otherwise. They, therefore, provide part of the system of checks and balances that I am putting in place to protect the interests of minority communities.

As is the position in the House, it is normal for a publicly elected body to have in place standing orders for the conduct of proceedings and meetings. Although each existing council has standing orders in place voluntarily, I am making that a mandatory requirement in Part 7. I am also taking a power for my Department to specify matters that must be included in the standing orders. I am taking that action to provide the mechanism that is necessary to set out the practical operation of the two further aspects of the checks and balances that this Part also introduces.

The first of those aspects is qualified majority voting, where the support of 80% of the members of a council present and voting at a meeting will be required for a specified decision or resolution to be agreed. The decisions, to be specified by my Department, will include the permitted form of governance to be adopted and the method to be used for allocating positions of responsibility.

The other aspect is the provision of a call-in procedure. That will enable 15% of the members of a council to request that a decision of a non-regulatory nature is reconsidered. The procedure can be used if the members consider that the decision either was not arrived at after a proper consideration of all the relevant information or that it would disproportionately affect adversely any community in the district.

As I indicated, the new councils need to be open and transparent in their operation and in the transaction of their business. In addition to the publication of a constitution, Part 8 updates the statutory framework for access to meetings and documents of a council. The presumption will always be that a meeting of the council or a committee must be open to the public except in certain limited circumstances. The circumstances under which the public must be excluded and those under which the council may exclude the public are more clearly specified in the Bill.

This Part also expands on the extent of the information to be made available to the public in advance of a meeting

of a council and subsequently on request, including the report and any associated background material for any item that is on the agenda for discussion at the meeting. I know that a large number of councils, particularly in response to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, currently publish the minutes of meetings on their websites. That will become a statutory requirement for the new councils. I am also taking the opportunity to clarify the information that must be available to members of a council.

Part 9 will address the conduct of councillors. It will establish an ethical standards regime to include a mandatory local government code of conduct for councillors and others who are appointed to take part in council business. The code will be supported by mechanisms for the investigation and adjudication of alleged breaches of the code, which will be the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints.

The Bill makes provision for the investigation and adjudication processes that should be undertaken by the commissioner, and it applies relevant provisions of the Commissioner for Complaints (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 to the ethical framework. Where, following an investigation, it is found that a person has failed to comply with the code of conduct, the commissioner may decide to censure, partially suspend, suspend or disqualify the person. In addition, the commissioner may make recommendations to a council about any matter relating to the exercise of a council's functions.

The mandatory code of conduct will be consistent with the seven Nolan principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership, as well as the four additional principles of equality, promoting good relations, respect and good working relationships that are already adopted by the Northern Ireland Assembly code. The code will detail the standards of conduct that are expected when acting as a councillor and conducting council business, including, very importantly, the discharge of the council's new planning functions. A draft of the code must be laid before and approved by resolution of the Assembly before it can come into force.

It is intended that the ethical standards framework should be reviewed after three to four years to assess how it is working and to consider whether any modifications are needed, such as the setting up of standards committees in councils.

Critical to the delivery of services that respond to local people's needs and ambitions will be an effective, statute-based community planning process that the new councils will lead and facilitate. Effective collaboration between service providers is in everybody's interest, and that is what Part 10 of the Bill sets out to achieve. Community planning is not about overriding or circumventing the existing responsibilities of those service providers; it is simply about local partners determining the broad and strategic context in which their responsibilities can best be exercised to deliver an agreed vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a district. Ensuring the successful implementation of community planning will be on the basis of joint working between a range of organisations and effective engagement with the community and the organisations that represent it.

The statutory framework is, of necessity, high level and considers the key principles to provide appropriate flexibility for individual councils that are likely to face different circumstances. However, my Department will be publishing statutory guidance for councils and others in a wide range of areas to ensure the proper implementation of community planning. The guidance will provide practical advice on using the framework to best regional and local advantage. The guidance will expand on the detail of the arrangements in the Bill.

In fulfilling its role as a champion for the district and responding to local people's needs, a council may want to take action on issues that arise but may be unable to do so within its statutory framework. I am sure that Members could point to occasions in the past when they have been advised by a council's legal experts that an action they are proposing is outside their legal vires. In broad terms, that may not be the situation in the future, as I am introducing, in Part 11, a general power of competence for councils. That power will fundamentally change the way a council behaves. Instead of having to find a statute that would allow them to act, councils would be required to satisfy themselves that there was nothing to prevent them using the power. In broad terms, it would enable a council to act with similar freedom to an individual unless there is a law to prevent it from doing so. That will expand the breadth of actions that a council can take and broaden the power base of local government. It is intended to deliver increased confidence, enable innovation and unlock creativity. In turn, that should lead to greater efficiencies, improved partnership working and the ability to help communities, which was previously outside a council's remit.

To support the delivery of high-quality services, Part 12 overhauls the statutory provision for council service improvement. It aims to introduce an effective performance improvement regime that is better coordinated and more responsive to local needs and circumstances. It creates opportunities for councils to serve citizens better, which is vital if we are to secure sustainable improvements in our public services.

I accept that the provisions are detailed and, in places, complex. The subject itself is fairly complex, and many of the areas that I am striving to deal with have never been dealt with in legislation here. However, every effort has been made to ensure that it is not overly prescriptive. It introduces and confers on councils substantial flexibilities in the way in which they define, monitor and account for improvements. A power is included for Departments to specify performance indicators. My intention is that any such indicators would be developed in partnership with local government.

The Bill provides for an external assurance that a council, in preparing its improvement plan, has complied with the requirements of the performance improvement framework. That role will be undertaken by the local government auditor. The role of the local government auditor will also be strengthened to enable the auditor to make recommendations on performance improvement in councils both individually and collectively, if appropriate.

Recognising that the aim is to deliver improved services, a power is provided for Ministers, individually, to intervene in the operation of a council if it is shown that the council is failing to deliver its services, or a specific service,

as required, to meet appropriate standards within that Minister's area of responsibility.

That is particularly relevant where a Department has transferred a function to the new councils but retains overall responsibility for the overarching policy.

11.00 am

Delivering the Executive's vision for local government and improved outcomes for everybody will best be supported by partnership working between Ministers and their Departments and councils. That is why, in Part 13, I am establishing a partnership panel that will consist of Ministers and an elected representative from each of the new councils to formalise the relationship between Departments and councils at a political level. The panel will provide a forum for discussion of matters of mutual interest and concern.

Sections 127 to 129 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 contain powers enabling the Department of the Environment to supervise councils in the exercise of their functions. In recognition that other Departments currently have a responsibility for functions delivered by councils and that this will increase following the transfer of functions as part of the local government reform programme, Part 14 of the Bill extends the supervision powers to enable any Department to make use of them.

As I highlighted in my opening remarks, the Bill addresses a technical issue in relation to the structure of the Northern Ireland Audit Office. At the request of the Chief Local Government Auditor, with the agreement of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Part 15 amends the audit provisions in the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 to facilitate proposed changes to the structure of the local government audit section of the NIAO, which will bring it into line with arrangements for audit in the NIAO as a whole.

In addition to addressing a number of technical issues, the final part of the Bill — Part 16 — makes provision in two important areas connected with local government reorganisation. The first of these relates to expenditure by the existing councils in the run-up to the establishment of the new councils. Concerns have been voiced that the existing councils may act irresponsibly in their use of ratepayers' money during this period. By existing councils entering into sizeable or long-term contracts or loan arrangements, the new councils could be burdened with financial commitments that were not of their making. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 provided the statutory transition committees with controls over the existing councils' land disposals and capital and non-capital contracts. Provisions in Part 16 will extend those controls to cover the incoming councils during the shadow period and ensure that the existing councils act in a responsible and prudent manner in that period. Controls will also be introduced during the statutory transition committee period and the shadow period in relation to the treatment of council reserves and borrowings.

The reorganisation of the councils and the transfer of functions from Departments to councils will result in the transfer of staff, assets and liabilities to the new councils from existing councils, from other local government bodies and from Departments that are transferring functions to the

new councils. Provision for the development of schemes to effect these transfers is included in Part 16. This approach is consistent with that adopted for previous large-scale reorganisation in public administration; for example, in the health sector.

The schemes relating to staff will provide for the protection of contractual employment rights, terms and conditions of service and pensions and will apply statutory protections, including those enshrined in the TUPE regulations. Those relating to assets and liabilities will ensure the smooth transfer of the legal title of the assets and the liabilities associated with those assets to the new local government structure, without incurring any costs to existing or new councils. Provision is also made in Part 16 in relation to the payment of compensation to an individual who loses employment or has a reduction in remuneration as a direct result of the reorganisation programme.

In summary, I believe the Bill has numerous benefits for local government as it provides considerable opportunities for councils to actively engage with their community to shape their district and provide improved services for the community that they serve. It also provides the opportunity to invigorate local democracy by involving all sections of the community. The Bill will ensure that councils operate within a statutory governance framework with the high standard of behaviours that the public expect from their elected representatives.

I see the Bill as a necessary and highly desirable step in developing the capacity of local government. The greater freedom that councils will have under the Bill will, of course, place additional responsibilities on elected members and officers in local government regarding sound and accountable forward planning and decision-making as they work with the community in shaping their district for the coming years and beyond.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): As Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, I welcome the next stage in the Assembly's scrutiny of the Local Government Bill. The Committee has been kept updated by the Department on the progress of the policy underlying the Bill. Members received a synopsis of the responses to the public consultation in June 2011 and the final synopsis, together with the Department's response, in July 2012. At its most recent meeting last week, departmental officials briefed the Committee on the Bill, which has been amended from the original proposals to reflect the responses to the consultation, representations from stakeholders and developments in other jurisdictions.

Members understand that the Bill will provide the legislative basis for the reform of local government. That will include statutory governance arrangements to provide for proportionality in the allocation of positions of responsibility; an ethical standards regime, to include a mandatory local government code of conduct for councillors; council-led community planning and a general power of competence for councils; an updated performance improvement regime; the extension to all Northern Ireland Departments of the supervision powers currently available to the Department; the establishment of a partnership panel between Ministers and elected representatives from councils; and the transfer of staff, assets and liabilities as part of the reorganisation programme. These are comprehensive reforms that will

impact on every aspect of the operation of councils, and the Department has informed the Committee that, as well as the large Bill in front of us today, there will be a raft of subordinate legislation and guidance to follow.

There are aspects of the Bill on which the Committee will require further information, particularly where these will represent a radical change from existing practice. An example is the removal of a bar on council staff being councillors as a result of a European Court of Human Rights ruling that such a blanket ban is unlawful. The Department proposes that council officials who work directly with and provide advice to councillors, such as chief executives or directors, will still be banned from standing for election, but members asked which other staff should also be debarred. The Department was unable to clarify that but indicated that it plans to go out to consultation to determine the appropriate level at which staff could not stand for election. On behalf of the Committee, I look forward to scrutinising the outcome of the consultation.

Departmental officials outlined the new ethical standards framework that will form an integral part of the Bill and explained that it had been amended significantly following stakeholder consultation. The Committee welcomed the requirement for the new mandatory code of conduct to be laid before the Assembly but was concerned to hear that there would be no appeals mechanism following a decision by the Commissioner for Complaints. The only recourse for a councillor affected by such a decision will be by way of judicial review. Members expressed reservations because a judicial review can be conducted only on limited grounds that relate mainly to procedural issues. Departmental officials have agreed to consult the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints on how appeals are handled in other jurisdictions, and we look forward to hearing more about that at Committee Stage. Members also inquired about the costs of handling complaints. We were informed that costs will be met by local government and will probably be apportioned on the basis of council size, which seems fair.

The Bill introduces a new system of checks and balances in council decision-making through the use of a call-in procedure to provide a review mechanism and qualified majority voting to determine the number of votes to be cast in favour of specified proposals. Members queried the level of support required to trigger a call-in: 15% of the council's membership. We asked officials which other options had been explored by the Department, but we are content that various aspects of the call-in procedure will be specified under standing orders and will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

The Local Government Bill will also introduce community planning. Although that has been in operation in England and Wales for some time, it will be a totally new concept to Northern Ireland. Members requested further information on how the list of those involved in community planning will be drawn up. We await the guidance and subordinate legislation that will identify the organisations eligible to engage in the process.

Members also raised the issue of capacity building to ensure that community planning is delivered effectively. Departmental officials indicated that a working group had been set up to deliver a programme with an initial focus on councillors and staff. Community planning is a

new concept so it is vital that there is active and informed participation not just from other Departments and statutory bodies but from voluntary and community organisations.

As I mentioned, the Committee is well aware of the quantity and complexity of the regulations and guidance on which the Bill will rely. Much of the Bill might even be considered enabling legislation. Accordingly, departmental officials have given an assurance that they will endeavour to provide the Committee with draft guidance and related subordinate legislation as soon as possible so that members can carry out well-informed and timely scrutiny.

When the House refers the Bill to the Committee, we will immediately issue a call for evidence. Members will welcome the views of interested organisations and individuals. We also look forward to maintaining an effective working relationship with departmental officials to bring the next stage of the Bill to a successful conclusion. On behalf of the Committee, I support the principles of the Bill.

With your indulgence, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will now say a few words as an MLA for South Belfast. I am glad to see the Bill finally before the House. We have waited for some time for it, having been promised it almost weekly since April. That has left us with a timescale that is workable but very tight.

11.15 am

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes.

Mrs D Kelly: I share the Member's concerns about the timescale, but I am sure that she will agree and indeed confirm that the delay has been a direct consequence of the chaos in the Executive and the fact that the Bill has lain on the desk of OFMDFM since April. That has not been the fault of the Environment Minister or his predecessor.

Ms Lo: I thank the Member for her contribution. Yes, I am aware of the delay in the Executive. We must all now work together with the best interests of local government reform at heart and not narrow party political interest.

From a departmental briefing to the Committee, I know that the Department hopes to have the Bill's Final Stage completed by the end of March. That would allow for a formal handover of functions to shadow councils in May. I am aware that elections to the shadow councils can take place without the Bill being finalised, but I think that we would all agree that that would be far from ideal. I would also like to hear from the Minister clarification of the proposed date of the election to shadow councils.

The Alliance Party strongly supports the formal entrenchment of proportionality for the allocation of civic posts such as chairs, vice-chairs and so on. I am relieved to see that the Bill clearly sets out the process to be undertaken for nominations to positions of authority. Expressly setting out how a system of proportionality should be applied will ensure that we do not see any of the undemocratic appointments similar to what we have seen in appointments to the statutory transition committees, particularly in Castlereagh, where my party colleagues have been denied a seat on the STC that is rightfully theirs. However, d'Hondt brings with it its own problems. It is inherently inflexible and may well unintentionally institutionalise the dominance of particular sections of the community in certain areas. The Alliance Party's

preference, where local agreement cannot be reached, would be for the use of a different mechanism such as the single transferable vote or Sainte-Laguë. D'Hondt is a blunt form of proportionality; it skews outcomes in favour of bigger parties and favours sections of the community that have a less fragmented number of political parties. The single transferable vote system would overcome that fragmentation. For instance, if we were to use d'Hondt to allocate the post of mayor, we could see in Lisburn and Castlereagh unionists holding the post for all four years of the electoral cycle, despite being less than 70% of the population there.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate the point that the Member makes, and I suppose that that is why there are options for allocation and, in that sense, the Bill is not prescriptive. STV is mentioned as one option for allocation. The issue was looked at fairly extensively in the policy development panel, and people were sympathetic to that being included as an option. If you ring-fence the use of a system purely for the allocation of the position of mayor, for example, and you are allocating four positions over a four-year period, d'Hondt is reasonably workable. The problem is that, to have a fair allocation across the board for all positions in the initial round of the allocations from the list, you may well be dealing with up to 100 positions. At that point, d'Hondt massively breaks down and is not really applicable. It is very hard to work. Furthermore, in those circumstances, with d'Hondt and other means, whatever quirks there are at the very top end tend to level out with proportionality at that point. There is a specific problem with applying STV when you have, in most cases, an electorate of 40, which is the number of councillors, and you are electing to perhaps 100 positions. STV kind of breaks down and is fairly unworkable at that point.

Ms Lo: I thank the Member for his contribution. I know that Mr Weir has been a long-term councillor, and I certainly look forward to hearing his input during Committee Stage. In response to what he said about STV, I say that I have never been a councillor myself, but I still think that locally agreed positions would be the best among councillors. That would be the most democratic way of dealing with issues.

I have lost my place now. Similarly, no unionist would hold office top office in Derry, Strabane or Newry, despite making up a significant minority of the electorate. I believe that those outcomes run contrary to the spirit of proportionality, which is critical in what continues to be a deeply divided society.

I note the opportunity in the Bill for councils to reach local agreement. I recognise that that happens well already in a number of councils, although, sadly, as with appointments to STCs, there are examples of councils where the political maturity to reach fair and equitable decisions based on the will of the electorate, clearly demonstrated at the ballot box, is lacking. Unsurprisingly, again in Castlereagh, my party has been denied positions of authority unfairly, and the same has happened in Ards. For the Alliance Party, what would be delivered if the single transferable vote mechanism were applied would be the minimum that we would settle for under local agreement. Where councils seek to give greater representation to parties that have smaller numbers, we may support that; where those with large numbers seek to dominate and bully, we will not. Local agreements and the numbers necessary to agree

to them are parts of the legislation that will need much greater scrutiny in Committee, and I commit to doing that.

I strongly welcome the commitment in the Bill to a statutory code of conduct for councillors, something that we could have done with in the not-so-recent past. Currently, unlike for MLAs, there is no one a councillor can be referred to if they do not act as one would expect them to. I am glad to see that anomaly being changed by the legislation. There are several things that the code of conduct must cover. In my view, it must include councillors' behaviour both inside and outside the council chamber. I would like to see a commitment to goodwill included in any code of conduct — councillors working with each other in a way that introduces goodwill to the council setting. Unlike many others who will speak in the debate, I have never been a local councillor, as I said. However, viewed from the outside and according to examples I have heard from party colleagues, goodwill can often seem to be sadly lacking in council chambers across Northern Ireland, perhaps particularly in recent times. If councillors can form that with each other and set a positive example in that respect, it can flow from there and enable communities and individuals to engage in thinking and behaving that cultivates goodwill and positive relationships in various forms and scenarios. There should be a commitment to dignity in how councillors work with each other and everyone in their constituencies.

A third thing that, I believe, is essential in any code of conduct is a commitment to civic leadership. I accept that councillors will undertake a declaration in which they commit to fulfilling the duties of the office to the best of their judgement and ability. However, I believe that, if the code of conduct were to contain a commitment to civic leadership, that would go one step further, affirming councillors' roles as civic leaders with a common purpose to improve our city and the lives of those within it.

In discussions at Committee level, we have already noted that there is no appeal mechanism in the Bill for when councillors are reported to the commissioner. That is something that we may need to return to. There are also a few issues around the sanctions that may be applied to councillors who are found to have breached the code which will require greater scrutiny at Committee Stage.

It is no secret that my party policy in respect of the national flag at council buildings is that the flag should be flown on designated days at all councils. We firmly believe, in line with the majority of councils in England, Scotland and Wales, that that is the most appropriate mechanism to represent the constitutional position of Northern Ireland and the special circumstances that we have here. I realise that the ongoing Haass talks seek to deal with issues like that. I am hopeful for an outcome. However, I seek assurances from the Minister today that, if that turns out not to be the case, he will consider including it at a further stage. Without placing this on a statutory footing, I am sure that we could all predict the first agenda item on many of the new councils. We would see trouble ahead. Proving, perhaps, that not a lot has changed from the old days would not be a good way to start. There are merits in a standard approach across Northern Ireland. It would show that all space is truly shared and operates within the framework of regulation. However, perhaps more importantly than the merits, I believe that this is too divisive an issue to be taken on by each council on its own on 11

separate occasions. It is up to us in this Chamber to show some real leadership.

The inclusion of community planning in the Bill is very welcome. The system works well elsewhere. I am hugely in favour of the community being involved in shaping health and well-being provisions in their area. Coming from many years in the voluntary sector, I certainly think that it has a great role to play in this area. Much work is needed on capacity building for local community and voluntary groups, as well as councillors, to enable everyone to take part in the process, to fulfill their potential to the best of their abilities and to be meaningful. People spend a lot of time and effort thinking ahead about what they want for the community. It is important that their efforts come to fruition and they feel that they have the power and participation to shape the future. Efforts must be made to engage communities in the process at every available opportunity. Councils and councillors must facilitate and encourage this. It cannot be allowed to be a power grab by councils because they believe that they know best.

In closing, I reaffirm my support for the Bill. I look forward to scrutinising it closely and thoroughly with my Committee colleagues. I commit to working with each of them in an open manner, and hope for similar in return. I also look forward to working closely with the Minister and the departmental officials. I support the Bill moving to Committee Stage.

Ms Brown: As Deputy Chair of the Environment Committee, I support the Bill in its Second Reading.

At the outset, I declare an interest as an elected member of Antrim Borough Council. I declare that, as a newly appointed member of the Environment Committee, there is much in the Bill that I am still familiarising myself with. I, perhaps more than most, am looking forward to the Committee Stage, when we will be able to scrutinise fully many aspects of the Bill. As a further brief opening comment, as Deputy Chair of the Committee, I formally welcome the Minister to his new role and wish him every success in carrying out his duties.

11.30 am

I do not think that anyone in the House will argue that, at 26 councils, Northern Ireland's local government is overdue for reform and streamlining. During my time as an elected member of Antrim Borough Council, I have been lucky enough to work with the chief executive, senior management teams and council officers, who have consistently delivered the highest levels of service to all members of the community. I pay tribute to them. In my opinion, they have set the standard to which newly reconstituted councils must live up to.

A key benefit of devolution is empowering local people to have a voice in the decisions that impact on their lives. I believe that it is right that the Bill is seen as a further stage of the devolution process, which should see not only more local accountability but greater community involvement in decisions on funding, planning, roads, housing, regeneration and community development.

Sometimes, in Northern Ireland, using the words "residents" or "community" has negative connotations, given our troubled past and recent difficulties, but for all the negative headlines, there are dozens upon dozens of hard-working community groups and dedicated individuals

who never make the headlines but nevertheless make an incredibly positive contribution in their areas. I hope that the new frameworks for local government, as outlined in the Bill, particularly with community planning, will allow those in the community to have a greater say in how their council delivers for them and the entire community.

Given the scale of reform that we are undertaking, it is only natural that there may be more questions than answers at this stage in the process. However, I will make one or two observations before leaving the Floor open to other Members who wish to speak.

Although transitional committee meetings have been taking place across the Province in preparation for the changes, I wonder whether the Department has fully considered how to maximise the opportunities that the reform provides. Let me give one example. The establishment of the improvement, collaboration and efficiency (ICE) programme seems to be a very sensible initiative that aims to identify opportunities for collaboration and efficiency across local government. However, at present, it appears that a council can choose whether or not to be part of the programme. I am happy to be corrected if that is not the case, but it strikes me as one area in which it might be better to have everyone on the same page from the outset, identifying shared systems and savings at the outset rather than managing several different systems for, for example, our payroll systems. Surely encouraging that degree of coordination can lead only to uniform best practice across all council areas rather than just some of them.

One aspect of the Bill that I particularly welcome is the transferring of a number of functions from Departments to the new councils. It is a common criticism or perception that the Assembly does not do enough to deliver on the ground. Therefore, this measure should go some way to ensure that local people can have a real say in many areas of policy that were previously centralised — in particular, local planning, especially in relation to town centres, community relations, rural development and tourism. To fully realise the potential of those possibilities, it is essential that councils carry out their functions openly and transparently, recognising that their duty is to deliver for everyone in the community.

Sadly, in our past, we have seen times when councils have taken decisions that have been divisive and not in any way beneficial to wider community relations. I hope that the new arrangements for scrutiny and decision-making will ensure that no one section of a council can act in a way that damages the good work that goes on in the communities that I referred to.

I believe that the Bill constitutes the most significant set of reforms that we have seen in recent times. It recognises the role that councils play in the community and empowers them to deliver social, economic and environmental change. That can be only a good thing for Northern Ireland, as we strive to build on devolution and deliver real change for all our constituents.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an fhaill labhairt ar an Bhille. I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on the Bill. Although mindful that we will go through a long period — in fact, a relatively short period — of dealing with this

138-clause Bill over the next couple of months, I welcome the opportunity to do that.

I would like to pay tribute to the people on the policy panels, who put a lot of work into this. I see the previous Minister here today. Through the reference groups and everything else, he, too, put a lot of work into it, so I want to pay tribute to him as well. I wish the new Minister every success with his first legislation.

We, as a party, have always been very supportive of reforming, improving and delivering more responsive services to the needs of local ratepayers and, in general terms, making local government more democratic and accountable to the citizens whom we represent.

This is one of the most important pieces of legislation that will ever be introduced in the Assembly. It will facilitate the establishment of 11 new councils, the biggest change in local government in over 40 years. In this mandate, more functions will transfer from the control of Departments to local government. In many cases, local government will be best placed to deliver and roll out those services at ground level.

In this part of the island, local authority is responsible for administering only approximately 4p or 5p in the tax pound. Common sense suggests that that needs to change. We are significantly out of kilter with many EU states that see localism as best. We, as a party, are also strong supporters of the principle of subsidiarity, in that, where possible, certain functions can and should be delivered most effectively at local level.

All that said, from an historical perspective, my party has been reluctant to load on to local government any significant additional responsibilities until it can demonstrate that it can deliver such responsibilities in a fair and equitable manner. Unfortunately, one does not have to delve too deep into the recent past to see how some councils failed to exercise in a fair and equitable manner the powers given to them.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for giving way. On that point about fairness and equality, does the Member agree that Lisburn City Council has refused to use any method of proportionality to ensure that two Sinn Féin councillors would sit on the statutory transition committees? Despite the Minister having written to the council on two occasions, it still refuses to use the d'Hondt system.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for the intervention. I agree with her, and I will touch on that later. Guidance has been issued, and guidance has not been followed. The Minister is well aware of it, and Members will discuss it. If it is the case that some will not follow the guidance, we need to look at regulation and legislative powers to ensure that such things do not happen again and that there is proper representation. I was just about to mention that very point. There has been abuse of housing powers in the past, and we see problems with the likes of the STCs at the minute.

I am keen to ensure that, in the transfer of additional functions and responsibilities, we establish a firm bedrock of checks and balances to ensure effective scrutiny and accountability of the decision-making process and the decisions made therein. The key to providing greater democratic accountability in the workings of local government is providing it in the construct and make-up of the administrative body itself.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member's giving way. I am sure that he would want it clarified that Lisburn City Council made clear that, if Sinn Féin wanted to take up a position on the statutory transition committee, we would support it in taking one of those positions. I am sure that the Member would want to make sure that the minority unionist community of Dunmurry also has representation, which is secured through the locally elected DUP councillor for the area. The first situation has now been addressed because the SDLP's John Drake — maybe he is not a member of the SDLP any more — has taken up the position. We have ensured that there is a nationalist representative on that committee.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for the intervention, but to my knowledge he does not represent the people of a certain area over there. However, the key element in all this — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that putting this debate into its proper context is useful; however, describing in minute detail issues that are in the immediate past is not. The Bill will deal with a new beginning, if you like, and I think that it is correct to indicate where improvements can be made. However, there is no purpose and benefit in going into the entrails of decisions that were made elsewhere and under different legislation. So, can we just stick to the purpose of this debate, which is about the new beginning for local government and the legislative basis on which it will be delivered?

Mr Boylan: I will take your guidance on that, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. My point is that we need to deal with things through regulation. I think that that is the key element. It is a new start, and I think that we have an opportunity in this Bill to do that. However, I will take your advice and concentrate on the principles of the Bill on the protections for minority groupings. I would like the Minister to expand a wee bit on the call-in procedure, which is set at 15%. I believe that that will provide an opportunity for the reconsideration of certain decisions. Will the Minister indicate whether, if the percentage were to be changed, that decision would go back to the Executive or whether councils would deal with it?

I welcome the introduction of community planning. The new function will, for the first time, compel many of the local statutory agencies to work in tandem with local councils and representatives from the community and voluntary sectors. I would wish to see the final community plan legislation sufficiently strong to ensure that the statutory partners fully engage with the new council authorities. I hope that those partners will provide senior officials to attend meetings and resources and expertise to assist in the effective delivery of programmes that must have at their heart the genuine intention to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of our citizens.

That should go a long way to putting local communities at the heart of the agenda. There cannot, and should not, be any ceiling to the remits, scope, partnership opportunities and potential of effective community planning to deliver for our communities. The key to good community planning is building on partnership arrangements and building trust among participants.

I ask the Minister to comment on the role of the border corridor groups. Is there a role for them in ensuring the

well-being of people in the border areas? Clause 77(3) says that a council and its community planning partners “must have regard to” guidance. Does the Minister consider that language strong enough? Perhaps he will comment on that in his response.

I also welcome the councils’ general power of competence. That is an important departure and an improvement on the earlier, muted power of well-being. The general power of competence will empower councils to carry out functions that fall outside the responsibilities of the other statutory bodies. I hope that that will go some way to bridge gaps where issues in the past have been passed between Departments with no one Department wishing to take responsibility. That said, there also needs to be clear regulations — I mentioned guidelines — to determine the extent of such a power and to mitigate any potential issues. As I mentioned, it is important that proper partnerships take effect between the citizens and those bodies that are charged with delivering services, whether they are for central or local government. Equally, there needs to be strong partnership between central and local government.

I ask the Minister to expand a wee bit on what will trigger the 80% qualified majority and how he sees it working in the decision-making process.

11.45 am

I want to talk a wee bit about the subordinate legislation that is coming forward in relation to the Bill. Will the Minister expand on some of the subordinate legislation that we will need to bring forward, because, clearly, we are going through the process of bringing forward the Bill? Does he feel that the subordinate legislation needs to run in tandem with the Bill? Perhaps, he could touch on some of that.

I want to raise a couple of other points. I have general concerns about the transfer of functions, obviously. There has always been a concern within local councils about the costs and funding of that. Perhaps the Minister could touch on what other issues have come forward with regard to what is needed for the transfer of functions and how he believes he will see that being funded.

I am aware that some of my colleagues will pick up on some of the other principles in the Bill, but I have a final point. I want to talk about the transfer of assets and liabilities and what proposals are in place to ensure that we maximise the assets of the council areas for the benefit of the whole area.

Sin a bhfuil le rá agam. That is all that I have to say for now. I support the principles of the Bill, and I look forward to the scrutiny in Committee. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mrs D Kelly: On behalf of the SDLP, I too welcome the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill and support it, in the main. However, there are a number of points on which I seek further information and on which I wish to make comment.

There are a few issues in relation to ending the dual mandate, and I think that that is important. There is, of course, an issue in which some Members are also members of the House of Lords, and the issue of whether that would bar an individual from being a councillor has not been referred to. The Minister might want to reflect on that.

It is an important Bill, and I think that we all know the importance of service delivery to the local ratepayer and the role that local councils have.

In his comments, Mr Boylan said that localism is the best. Given that, I have been somewhat puzzled when, in the past, Sinn Féin insisted on there being seven super councils and finally settled for 11, when other parties wanted to see a reduction to 15. However, we are used to having contradictory messages coming from Sinn Féin on the matter.

There are issues that I have been concerned about for a long time in relation to local councils, not least protection and safeguards for minority communities. I have also been concerned about the power and function of the local government auditor. Over many years, I know that the auditor has issued management letters to local councils, and, year on year, we see the same recommendations not being complied with by them. In other words, lack of regulation and authority has been given to the local government auditor in the past, and he or she has largely been ignored by local councils across a wide range of recommendations. I therefore seek further clarification on the suggested increase in powers and authority for the local government auditor and I will be scrutinising the Bill more closely when we see its progress through Committee.

It is also important that there is greater openness and transparency, and I welcome the Minister’s commitment to put that into statute. In the past, the SDLP in some councils called for the press to be allowed to attend committee meetings, but that was voted down by our unionist colleagues in Craigavon. I can speak with some authority on that happening in the past. It is a sad reflection on the members of that time. I believe that ratepayers should have full access to information, and that it is provided to them, by those who are making decisions on their behalf. Therefore, I welcome the improvements in those matters that are promised in this Bill.

I welcome the suggestion of delegated authority. I am somewhat concerned, however, about the executive function. In my experience, some chief executives, though not all, tend to restrict information going to all members of councils and all elected representatives. I hope that those councils that choose to have the executive power and Cabinet-style control will share the widest possible range of information among all elected representatives. After all, they all have the same mandate.

I also welcome the greater ethical standards that are to be required of local councillors through the code of conduct. I note the appointment of a commissioner; it would be interesting to hear how that commissioner’s office is going to be funded. It might be useful to require local elected representatives to have some mandatory training in line with the good relations commitments. It would be useful, in the interests of transparency, to require each elected representative to sign a register of interests rather than having a voluntary system. That helps with the wider public’s perception that it is an open, transparent and accountable form of governance.

I want now to refer to a case in which I was involved in the past in Craigavon Borough Council. Mr Gardiner was also involved in it. The council’s management was making certain decisions and was disbaring aggrieved

employees of that council from seeking representation from their local representatives. We felt very strongly about that, particularly where there was a closed atmosphere of decision-making and some employees were adversely affected.

I can understand how, from a management point of view, employees cannot go running to public representatives at the drop of a hat on every issue, but nonetheless, I feel strongly that people who have genuine grievances should be able to have representation and to have their case heard. I know that there are instances currently in some councils across the North where employees have been very clearly told that they are not allowed to seek representation. Despite that, this Bill allows some employees to put themselves forward for election. There seems to be some level of disconnect between those two sorts of rulings, so I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on that particular scenario.

I welcome the qualified majority voting and the safeguards and protections. The SDLP has been exercised about that for quite some considerable time. I welcome the methodology and the powers that the Minister is introducing in the Bill.

I want now to refer to comments that have been made by other contributors about the experience thus far of the statutory transition committees. The previous Minister introduced guidance because there was a greater sense of partnership, power sharing and representation in the voluntary transition committees than is proving to be the case in the statutory transition committees. In Craigavon, Banbridge and Armagh councils, for example, the SDLP has only one representative on the statutory transition committees but had three on the voluntary transition committees. That does not send out the right message if all the parties in this Chamber are signing up to a better Northern Ireland with a shared future and partnership and power sharing. The STCs thus far do not exemplify the best of that ethos of partnership and power sharing.

I do not know whether the Minister has any power to redress some of the imbalances that were highlighted by Ms Lo and Ms McCann in their contributions.

I take with a pinch of salt the Alliance Party decrying d'Hondt when it has served it more than well. It was not too worried about d'Hondt when it came to the selection of Ministers to sit around the Executive table. Our party lost out on an additional Minister, and the Ulster Unionists lost out. So, I take with a pinch of salt some of those comments from the Alliance Party.

I welcome the community planning aspect of the Bill, though it is something that we require further information about. Community planning offers real and exciting opportunities for local people and for local partnerships to work and deliver in the best interests of the citizens they serve. Like Mr Boylan, I have some concerns that although it might start out with the right people around the table — the decision-makers — as we saw in the past, with the peace and reconciliation partnerships and the community safety partnerships, what happens is that the other agencies quite often send staff who are not the decision-makers, which dilutes the power and authority of a partnership.

Neighbourhood renewal in my area is something that I am concerned about. Some community organisations are represented around the table and others are not.

Neighbourhood renewal is one partnership that needs to be examined, but I recognise that that falls under the Social Development Minister's functions. There have been some good practices in neighbourhood renewal, but we need the right people around the table, and they are the decision-makers. If people are signing up for community planning, that ought to be the case.

I also welcome the general power of competence. It is right and proper that local authorities can mix and take what some might refer to as brave decisions in the best interests of the people. If we do not take a risk sometimes, we fail our people. We have to weigh up that decision. It is also about people being confident in their professional judgement and in their ability to deliver. The power of general competence is something that all parties have largely welcomed.

I congratulate the Minister on trying to promote the idea of greater flexibilities in councils in some of their decision-making processes and the relationship between Departments, Ministers and councils, which is important to get right. We need a lot of clarification, and some Ministers have rolled back on some of the previous commitments on the powers and functions to be transferred. This whole reform process was about strengthening the power and function of local councils and, regrettably, some Ministers have rolled back on some of their commitments.

The expenditure of existing councils is a matter of concern for many existing councils, local businesses and ratepayers. That the oversight of expenditure power can fall to the new shadow councils is to be welcomed. There is evidence to suggest that some local councils are disposing of some of their income to make the decisions. I can understand why some of that happens, particularly if a council looks over the road and sees another council that is engaged in high spending, has little in reserve and is going to ask the ratepayer in the new district to pick up the tab. So, we need to settle people's anxieties around all that. This is one method that will hopefully resolve some of the difficulties that some are experiencing.

The Deputy Chair of the Environment Committee made an important contribution on the ICE programme and its voluntary nature. There have been far too many individual fiefdoms created amongst some but not all officers in local councils. They have been reticent in picking up the challenge and the opportunity that the ICE programme offered. If there is a way to force their hands, so that they go much faster and further than has been the experience to date, that ought to be welcomed. However, the message from the House to individuals who are blocking progress on these matters should be that political parties will be watching very closely when they fail to pick up those opportunities, and I am sure that they will not forget those contributions.

12.00 noon

It is important that the majority of front line service deliverers know that their terms of employment will be honoured. There is a lot of low morale and concern, particularly among staff who are employed in middle management and on the front line. They are valued workers and have been valued workers for many years. Indeed, they have been valued workers over many difficult years, and some had to go out to areas and provide a service through the worst of times. I think that it is right and proper that their contribution to public service is

recognised and that their concerns and worries about their jobs are allayed. I believe that the Bill will do that for the vast majority of staff.

Finally, on behalf of the SDLP, I welcome the Bill and look forward to its progress through Committee.

Mr Elliott: At the outset, I would say that there are aspects of the Bill that I obviously agree with. However, there are others that I and, I am sure, most other people do not agree with. One of the difficulties is that elements of the Bill will be hugely difficult to implement and control.

Also at the outset, I want to say that local government needs the recognition it deserves. For many years throughout the Troubles, it was the only form of government in Northern Ireland — the Assembly and Parliament Buildings did not operate, we did not have a Government and there was nothing between the local councils and Westminster. I think that it needs that recognition and credit. That is particularly the case for many people who served through those very difficult times. Indeed, some of them gave their lives for it. I do not just mean that they gave all their work commitment to it; they gave their lives. A number of people were murdered, and I think that that needs to go on record.

Today, we are talking about the principle of the Bill and taking it forward to its next stages. First, I want to deal with the bar on existing Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament and Members of the Assembly from standing as councillors, or rather, I should say, from serving as councillors. That provision is contained in schedule 1. I put on record our support for that principle, and parties should have been big enough to have accepted that some time ago and should have carried it out voluntarily instead of requiring legislation. However, that is where we are at the moment.

When the Minister gets to his feet, I would like him to clarify the timing of the Bill. My understanding is that the Bill is not required to be in law before next year's proposed local government elections on 22 May. That being the case, if it is not in law at that stage, I assume that that provision will not apply, and MLAs, Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament will be permitted to contest that election and serve as councillors until the legislation comes into being. I ask him for some clarification on that.

Part 5 of the Bill is on permitted forms of governance. Again, I would like clarification on that. Different governance arrangements are set out in that part of the Bill. One of those is the committee structure, which, as the Minister indicated, most councils utilise at the moment. However, the executive structure is also mentioned, and I would be grateful if the Minister would go into a little more detail on that. I know that there is a section on that. However, I would like him to explain how he sees that operating and working in different councils and which councils would operate it. Would it be the bigger ones? Would it be better for the larger councils, such as Belfast or the causeway grouping, or would it be better for the smaller council groups? I note that the chair and vice chair of councils would not be permitted to sit on that executive committee. That is like saying that we have the Executive Committee of the Assembly, and we would not have the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on that Executive Committee. Some people might say that it would

work much better. I do not know. However, some people might take that view, although I am not for one minute suggesting that. I am only asking whether that is how it would work — that the two main people on the council would not be permitted to sit on the executive committee.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. There are two points to that, and it might truncate what the Minister has to say later. With regard to the formation of an executive, if there were an executive, I suspect that it would be more like the model used in England, for example. I suspect that relatively few, if any, of the councils would embrace a full executive model, certainly at the start. However, there would be an opportunity for any council to set the parameters with regard to who would sit on that, and that could involve a mayor or a deputy mayor. The distinction to be drawn, and where the differences tend to be between what happens in England and an executive situation here, is that the mayor and deputy mayor become ceremonial positions and the political leadership of the council form the executive. I think that that is what is intended to be the case here. That is where the circle could be squared. However, there would not be any bar on a mayor or deputy mayor sitting on an executive, if that route were chosen. That is where the distinction lies.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Weir for that. When we do not have the civil servants on the Floor of the House to explain something, we can always be sure that Mr Weir will give us a reasonable Civil Service explanation of those points. We appreciate the expertise that he brings to the House. I accept what he said, and I know that he has put that point over before. However, the legislation clearly says that the chairs and vice chairs would not be part of the executive. I am wondering whether there are certain aspects of each council that could be run by the executive, and other aspects by committees and the full council.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. A further concern that was raised with me recently involved the Minister's council area of Derry, where the chief executive believes that she has to deal only with party leaders. The message has to go from this House and from the parties on council that the chief executives report to all members of council. Does the Member agree with that?

Mr Elliott: I certainly do agree. I am surprised to hear that the chief executive or any council official would suggest that they have to deal only with party leaders or group leaders on council. Every councillor should get the recognition that they deserve; every councillor is elected to their position and should be given that recognition by the officials. Again, I am throwing out some of the queries that the Minister might pick up, or we might pick up at a later stage.

I move on to clauses 44 and 45, which deal with the qualified majority and the power to require decisions to be reconsidered. Clause 44 states:

"Standing orders must specify decisions which are to be taken by a qualified majority."

Will direction be given in subordinate legislation, or will it just be guidance as to what those decisions will be, or is it entirely up to the councils to take that decision? At the Committee last week, officials indicated that we would have sight of all the draft secondary and subordinate legislation before we get through the final stages of the Bill and that we would also see all the guidance that will

come forward. If we got that, I would welcome it, as it would be extremely helpful to the Committee and to the entire House. However, there is a question around how the decision will be reached where that 80% qualified majority is needed. If it is left to councils alone, those decisions will be made only on the basis of what the majority of councillors decide. They could decide not to bring in some of those aspects under the qualified majority. That is why I am keen to hear the outworkings of that. The legislation also states that the regulations may amend those percentages, so we might not end up with 80%. We might end up with 60% or 70%, so, again, the regulations will be vital. Why would that change from 80%?

With regard to the powers that require decisions to be reconsidered — or, as I call it, the call-in of 15% of members of the council — the Bill states that a barrister or solicitor would be consulted. What direction would be given by the Department or the councils to a barrister or solicitor for that legal opinion? Where would the direction, guidance and legislation come from that he or she would be required to look at? Will it be only section 75 equality issues or will it be much broader? There are so many unanswered issues in the legislation. It is a large Bill with a lot of information so it throws up far more questions than answers.

In Part 9, which relates to the conduct of councillors, clause 56(3), for example, states that the principles “may be”, and clause 56(4) states that the code of conduct “may include”. Again, it is very woolly. As other Members said, there have already been issues around the appointment of statutory transition committees. I also see specific issues with the appointment of selection panels for the new chief executives. That is a major hurdle for you, Minister, and members of councils in the not-too-distant future. Positions will be divvied up and carved up between certain parties so that they have huge numbers or a vast majority on one side or the other. It is unfortunate that we have that carve-up at the moment.

Mrs D Kelly: I appreciate the Member giving way. We heard contributions about Lisburn and Belfast and the representation on that statutory transition committee. Would the Member be surprised to learn that in the new council of Derry and Strabane, Sinn Féin opted to take the chair and vice-chair of the statutory transition committee? That also breaches the spirit of voluntary power sharing.

Mr Elliott: Sinn Féin opted to do that in not only the Londonderry/Strabane statutory transition committee. I understand that Sinn Féin opted to do that in other areas and, indeed, has taken the chair and vice-chair of the Fermanagh/Omagh statutory transition committee, so, again, there is a lack of a reasonable sharing out of power and positions. I note in the code of conduct that it is up to the Department to issue guidance on that rather than the councils themselves. It will be interesting to see what guidance it comes up with and what will be in the legislation that they are required to adhere to.

In Part 11, clause 82 relates to a council's general power of competence. I heard a ringing endorsement of that from some Members. I have to tell you, friends, that I am afraid that it is not coming from this side because I do not believe that that is a good part of the Bill. It will be open to huge levels of gerrymandering and a lot of people putting their own perspective on it. You have only to read the first line of clause 82:

“A council has power to do anything that individuals generally may do.”

That will be open to huge abuse from those who have the majority on a council. At some stage, they will say that something does not require a call-in or a qualified majority. That aspect needs quite a lot of scrutiny. It needs to be amended. Actually, it needs to be withdrawn. I am concerned that it will be open to significant abuse. I heard the Minister say that it will give greater flexibility; I accept that point, but, with that, comes a balance. You can give too much flexibility, and you can give too much power, which is then abused. Dear help us — over recent weeks and months, have we not been very aware of the abuse of such powers?

12.15 pm

Part 16 deals with transitional rate relief. I welcome the provision for rate relief, but I do not believe that it will mitigate totally the overall financial shortfall from council reorganisation. Previously, Members have heard me mention the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) figure of £118 million. On several occasions since, I have asked whether there was any update on that figure. No one has been able to give me any update at all, nor have I been told whether the money could have been saved in a different 15-, 18- or 26-council model. Nobody has come up with a satisfactory resolution.

Members need to hear about some of the difficulties with rate convergence. How far the Bill can go with transitional rate relief will, obviously, be dictated by the amount of finance that the Minister can direct to it. I know that the Minister of Finance recently said that £30 million might be available, and I have to say that that is very welcome. However, look at Fermanagh and Omagh: in Omagh, local council rates — I am talking strictly about local council rates — are 50% higher than Fermanagh for domestic rates and 28% higher for non-domestic. The convergence of those rates will mean a huge imbalance for Fermanagh people compared with those in Omagh. We need to ensure a satisfactory resolution to that.

That brings me on to the other aspect. I talked to the previous Minister about it several times, and I am sure that I will have the same conversation with the current Minister. It is about the transfer of functions, the finance that follows that, how that finance will be derived and how to ensure that councils are not short-changed. Ratepayers could start to pay for functions that have come back to local councils without being followed by any central funding, so we need to be absolutely sure that the finance will follow from central government.

I suppose that many will be concerned and disappointed at the number of functions and powers that will be devolved to local councils, with planning, obviously, being the main one. How planning will be delivered by local government also presents a challenge.

I have already had a discussion with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about trying to devolve some finances to local government for tourism marketing in particular. Local councils and tourism marketing authorities could do a much better job of using that spend to market their area than NITB can do regionally.

A huge number of questions are unanswered, and I look forward to further debate.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call Lord Morrow, I just want to say that the Business Committee has agreed to meet at 12.30 pm. Therefore, I regret that I may need to interrupt you, Lord Morrow. However, if so, you will be the first Member called to speak when the debate resumes after Question Time, which will allow you to complete your contribution.

Lord Morrow: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. It may well be that even I will finish my comments before that. We will have to wait and see.

First, I welcome the fact that we are at the stage that we are with what is deemed to be very hefty legislation. It seems a long time since we started this journey. I know that there has been an attempt to blame one person after another, but I am not going to go down that road today, because it has been well covered. Some blame the Executive, some blame past Ministers, some blame present Ministers, and, I suspect, some will blame future Ministers. However, as the saying goes, we are where we are.

At the outset, I make it clear that I am a member of a council, namely Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council. One of the many good things that can be said about that council is that it seems to be able to achieve what no other council is capable of achieving, which is not increasing rates in four years. I ask all those who are members of councils to take note of that. It seems that every council automatically increases its rates every year, year on year, and some use a clever tactic of not increasing the rates in the year of an election, which, to me, is a wee bit deceptive. So, we do not do rate increases in Dungannon, and, if you want to know how that works, speak to me privately after the debate, and I will go through the whole thing with you.

As I said, the Bill is hefty legislation, and I look forward to when it comes to the Environment Committee, of which I am a member. It is in that Committee that the real scrutiny will take place.

It is proper and right — Tom Elliott touched on this — that we pay tribute today to councils and local government, because, during the worst of the Troubles in the history of this Province, it was local government that had to stand tall and it was councillors who had to put their head above the parapet when it was unpopular and, at times, extremely dangerous to do so. However, there were those in our society who felt that they had something to offer their community, so they put their name forward and stood for election. As a member of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council since autumn 1973, I know the difficulties that that entailed and brought to many families. As Mr Elliott has said, some even paid the ultimate sacrifice when their life was taken. That was scandalous: when democracy is attacked, everybody in society and in our communities is attacked. We are moving on, so, hopefully, we have seen the worst of it and will not go back to those days. The Bill and the reform of local government are an attempt to take society to a new place and to move forward.

I will not go through the Bill clause by clause today — the Minister gave a good overview of it — because, as I said, the real work will start when it comes to the Committee. I

suspect that we will take our time there. I have concerns, however, about the timing of the whole operation. I am concerned that we will not be in a position to have the Bill in statute by the time that the reform of local government is scheduled to be complete. I am sure that the Committee Chair will give due diligence to that, because we as a Committee have some responsibility to ensure that the Bill is treated in a way that means that it can go through as quickly as possible but not, I add, in haste. That would be the wrong way to go. We would be better to go slow and get it right than to go quickly and get it wrong, because there are big issues at stake for the future of local government.

There are a number of issues, and Dolores Kelly touched on one that I, too, have some real concerns about. That issue is the powers of the auditor. We will want to look very closely at that when the Bill comes to the Committee. That is paramount, particularly when we bear in mind that we will go into a different scenario altogether from that whence we have come. The auditor's powers should be very powerful, because there could be issues that would leave councillors or chief executives vulnerable. Our chief executives will have a big task here. They are responsible people who bring professional action to their post, but they will also welcome the auditor having strong powers.

I have a concern about the present debt in local government. That has been touched on by some Members. If my figures and memory are right, the present debt of local government runs at somewhere in the region of half a billion pounds. When I look at the debt in the new mid-Ulster councils of Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon, I discover that it is minimal. For instance, one council shows no debt, and two of the other councils show very little debt. Those three councils attribute, I think, about 1.3% or 1.4% of the total debt in local government. When I look across the spectrum of local government, I see that other councils have considerable debt, but, by the same token, it is a valid point when they say, "We have considerable assets to set beside that debt". I want to see if, in fact, the two do sit beside each other and how one council's debt sits in relation to its assets and how that will all work out. Furthermore, I want the Minister to tell us today whether there is a statutory obligation on a council to have a certain amount of reserves. I have heard both arguments. I have heard it said that there are guidelines to say that you should have certain reserves but no statutory obligation to have x pounds in your reserves. Some councils work consciously on that and are particular about having reserves. I am not saying that there is anything wrong with what other councils do, but I would like to see the logic behind it when they say, "No, we do not have any reserves or a statutory obligation to have any and, therefore, we will carry on merrily". I have concerns about that, and I want the Minister to tell us, either today or on another date, the legal position on that.

I also find it slightly contradictory that the Minister has told us today that council employees will now be able to stand for election. This is not a straightforward one, no matter what way you look at it. I listened carefully when he said why that was the case. In the very next breath, he spoke about those who are MPs and MLAs. I want to make it clear that I am not speaking from a selfish point of view; it is no secret that my days on Dungannon council are in the yellow leaf, and, therefore, it will not apply to me. However, I fail to understand how you can say that it is all about

equality and we must give equality, when someone who is an MLA or MP might feel that there is not much equality for them. I am not trying to put up the argument for it; I am simply trying to put forward the equality issue that we seem to always want to concentrate on when we legislate, understandably so. Those are some of the issues that I want the Minister to tackle and give more clarity on.

12.30 pm

I also have concerns about the community involvement provided for in clause 76. There is now a tendency in society as a whole and when we legislate that we sometimes run the risk of bypassing those who are elected and go for strong community involvement. I am not opposed to a strong community, but the best representatives of a community are those elected by the community. There seems to be an attempt to say, "Well, we have the elected representatives sitting there, but we will have another tier who will be as much consulted or have the same degree of influence". That needs to be carefully looked at.

I also think that other parts of the Bill will take quite a bit of scrutiny. Clause 45 relates to the power to require decisions to be reconsidered. I am not sure that it comes out clearly here how that will go forward. The clause states:

"Standing orders must make provision requiring reconsideration of a decision if 15 per cent. of the members of the council (rounded up to the next highest whole number if necessary) present to the clerk of the council a requisition on either or both of the following grounds".

The "following grounds" are not clear to me. The clause states:

"(a) that the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues;"

and:

"(b) that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district."

It goes on to state that the clerk of the council shall or may — I am not sure which it says — consult a lawyer.

I mean no disrespect — we have plenty of lawyers in this place and very able ones too — but, at the end of the day, a lawyer's view is but one man's opinion. You could go to another eminent and skilled lawyer and he would give you a totally different point of view. This has to be a bit clearer as to what exactly this is and what we are trying to say here. I believe that it is not clear and is open to interpretation. However, I suspect that most legislation is open to interpretation.

Part 8 makes provision for access to meetings and documents. Clause 46 states:

"A meeting of a council must be open to the public except to the extent that they are excluded".

Now, that is clear to a layman, but it continues:

"(whether during the whole or part of the proceedings) under subsection (2) or by resolution under subsection (4)."

It then goes on to give the reason why it would be like that. Those of us who serve on a council often know the reasons that will be given. It may be that there are some sensitivities around a business transaction, which sounds fair enough. Sometimes, councillors are a wee bit sceptical; I would not be among the sceptics. They feel that that is abused and that it is a euphemism for saying, "No, you can't have the answer because it doesn't suit". Therefore, there has to be real clarity around that, and I hope that the Minister will perhaps also take on board and deal with that issue when he sums up today or in Committee, where I suspect that he will be with us at some stage. Clause 128 —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Lord Morrow, I must interrupt you at this point, with regard to the Business Committee. You will be the first Member to speak when we resume the debate. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34 pm.

2.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Housing Executive: Chief Executive

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what discussions he had with John McPeake before, during and after his resignation from the post of chief executive in the Housing Executive. (AQT 141/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I have had no discussions with Mr McPeake on that matter. Mr McPeake is employed by the Housing Executive and, as the Member is well aware, the Housing Executive has its own board, its own chairman and its own chief executive. Therefore, his resignation was tendered to his employer, the Housing Executive. I was made aware of the fact that he was resigning, and the matter rests there. The chairman indicated to me that Mr McPeake will probably step down at the end of the financial year or, possibly, at the end of the calendar year. That matter is somewhat unclear.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister detail whether his much-vaunted overspend figure of £18 million, which now looks decidedly inaccurate and for which this House and the companies concerned might eventually be owed an apology, played any role in any discussions that he had or that others may have had on his behalf with Mr McPeake prior to his resignation?

Mr McCausland: I find the supplementary question somewhat surprising in so far as I said that there were no discussions with Mr McPeake. Therefore, the supplementary is somewhat irrelevant.

Help-to-buy Scheme

2. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the help-to-buy scheme, which the Prime Minister announced at the weekend, to state whether he believes it will work and whether it will be available in Northern Ireland. (AQT 142/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Next week, the help-to-buy mortgage guarantee scheme, originally announced by the Chancellor in Budget 2013, will be open to applications. That scheme will operate right across the United Kingdom and will see the Government and lenders guaranteeing up to 15% of a property's value. It will allow potential buyers to purchase a home with a 5% deposit, with the balance covered by a mortgage.

Several high street banks will be offering the new help-to-buy mortgages to customers. So far, RBS and Lloyds have confirmed that they will participate. The mortgages will range from 80% to 95% of the property's value and will be on a repayment basis. Borrowers will be subject to the usual affordability and income-verification checks normally conducted by lenders to ensure that they can afford the mortgage that they are applying for.

Mr Hilditch: A number of commentators suggested that the scheme could lead to a house price bubble. How will the Government ensure that that does not happen?

Mr McCausland: Some of those concerns have been more directed towards the situation in the London area and the south-east of England as opposed to the north of England or Northern Ireland. Every September, the Government and the Bank of England's financial policy committee will be reviewing the impact of the scheme and examining whether the fees or the price cap should be adjusted. So, at the United Kingdom level, there will be that safeguard to ensure that you do not get a house price bubble. In the Northern Ireland situation, it would be very unlikely anyway.

UN Special Rapporteur

3. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the recent visit by the UN special rapporteur Ms Rolnik. (AQT 143/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The visit by the UN special rapporteur to the United Kingdom as a whole generated a large amount of newspaper coverage, a large portion of which was extremely uncomplimentary about Ms Rolnik. I think it was the 'Daily Express' that described her as the "Brazil nut". Other newspapers followed a similar line. Her Marxist pedigree seemed to have influenced some of her comments.

A lot of detailed comment was made after her visit to Northern Ireland, but on the basis of a very short visit, and having seen her preliminary comments — her final report will not appear until March 2014 — some of her views seem extremely ill-informed. I think that someone from a country where there are tens of millions of people living in shanty towns is in a poor position to comment on the housing situation here in Northern Ireland. She might have been better spending some time sorting problems out in Brazil, where tens of millions of people live in appalling conditions.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he confirm that Ms Rolnik's programme was organised in collaboration with the Participation and the Practice of Rights group (PPR) and that she only visited social housing on one side of the community?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for her supplementary question as it raises a significant issue. The Participation and the Practice of Rights project, which is a lobby organisation, seems to have had a key role in organising her visit. It was noticeable that, in the one day that she spent here, she spent longer with that group than she did with officials in the Department for Social Development or the Housing Executive. It was also significant that, during that visit, she spent two and a half hours in the afternoon touring the New Lodge, Seven Towers and Sailortown areas. She was here to look at the whole of Northern Ireland, yet she devoted two and a half hours to one specific area.

I was also interested to note, when I spoke to community organisations in adjacent unionist communities, that none of them had been informed by PPR about the visit, they had not been invited to any of the meetings and she was not invited to their communities. I think the fact that PPR excluded unionist communities and only took her to a

nationalist community says a lot about that group and its operation. If we are dealing with housing issues, we need to deal with the whole community: unionist, nationalist and other. Everybody deserves a fair deal, although not in the eyes of some people. People are dealing in human rights issues, yet I thought that one human rights issue was the right to equality of treatment. That certainly does not seem to be the case in this instance.

Social Housing

4. Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Social Development, given his comments about the help-to-buy scheme and the potential for a second housing bubble, whether he plans to increase the number of social housing units to meet the demand. (AQT 144/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Member raises the question of increasing the amount of social housing, which is a matter that is very near to my heart. It is something that I have put a lot of effort into, but the problem that we face is that the people who are meant to be delivering social housing in Northern Ireland, the housing associations, have not really stepped up to the mark. I dealt with this in the Chamber recently; we have around 30 housing associations in Northern Ireland, and only around half a dozen of them are really building. Some, in fact many of them, do not build at all. A small number are building, and an even smaller number do the overwhelming majority of the newbuild. We need a situation where housing associations are stepping up to the mark.

I think that they have a lot to learn from some of the housing associations in Great Britain that are much more creative, imaginative and innovative. If that were the case with housing associations here, I think that we would be in a much better position to deliver social housing. It has been disappointing to me, and I will meet housing associations again in the not-too-distant future to press them on this. I have met them and I have met the Housing Executive and pressed them on this issue in the past. The housing associations and the Housing Executive need to deliver more if we are to achieve the sort of targets that the Member and I would want to see delivered.

It is a sad situation when there is money there to be spent, but you are not able to spend it. In fact, quite often, there is a rush to buy off the shelf to make up numbers at the end of the year. That is not a good way of doing things. It is not a planned way, and it is not the proper way to do it. It is the best way in the circumstances, but the problem needs to be tackled at its heart: we need to get the housing associations building.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given what he has just said and with a waiting list of approximately 40,000 people, does he think that enough social housing is being built? What key actions can we take forward to see results quickly?

Mr McCausland: In a sense, the answer that I gave to the first question has dealt with part of the second. There are 40,000 people on the waiting list, but I could own a house in Cultra worth £1 million and still be on the waiting list.

Mr Weir: You wish.

Mr McCausland: Yes, I do wish. *[Laughter.]* There is not much chance of it.

A person could be the owner of a house worth £1 million or whatever in Cultra and could still put themselves down on the waiting list. Anybody can put themselves down. You could be on the waiting list with no points, but you are still on the waiting list. You are actually dealing with a smaller number than the number that has been mentioned when it comes to real need. That is why we deal with the issue of stress and people who are over 30 points, rather than people who are possibly sitting there with no points or are already homeowners. A person can be a homeowner in any situation and still put themselves onto the waiting list, so the figures that are often quoted can be somewhat misleading.

The real challenge is that we get a situation where housing associations are facing up to the challenge and really delivering. We have a higher level of housing association grant in Northern Ireland than in GB. Housing associations here are in a privileged position because of that, so we really need to see more delivery. I had a very useful visit across to Liverpool and Manchester not so long ago to see some of the work being done by housing associations there in not just their newbuilds but some of their other initiatives, which were very imaginative. I would like to see more of that here.

Shared Neighbourhood Projects

5. Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development, as the Minister responsible for delivering 10 shared neighbourhood projects as part of the OFMDFM Together: Building a United Community strategy, to update the House on what neighbourhoods have been identified, where those neighbourhoods are and a timescale for their delivery. (AQT 145/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The issue of shared communities is one that members of the Alliance Party often seek to raise.

Mr Lyttle: We certainly do.

Mr McCausland: Absolutely.

I make this point often when the issue is raised: segregation is not limited to social housing. There is as much segregation in private sector housing as there is in many areas of social housing. Secondly, social housing integration can take place only where there is a desire and willingness to do it. In many places, that is not the case. For example, if I come through the Westlink, I see a block of flats with the names of hunger strikers on it and one with tricolours on the top of it. I do not think that people from the unionist community are going to feel very comfortable there. Quite clearly, certain communities have made a choice. The aim is to have more shared communities developed and supported during the next number of years, and that is being taken forward. However, it has been a challenge to fill up Springfarm in Antrim, for example, which was brought forward as a shared scheme. I am not absolutely sure that there is the huge appetite that is sometimes put forward for other schemes.

I am happy to come back to the Member with more details on where we are. I can give him details of 11 shared newbuild schemes. I am happy to come back to him with more details, but I am not as —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, you are well over your time.

Mr McCausland: — confident that it will necessarily be delivered sometimes —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am afraid, Mr Lyttle, that it will have to be a very quick supplementary.

Mr Lyttle: The Minister says that he is not sure that there is appetite for shared neighbourhoods. He seems to disagree with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that their strategy sets out the need for 10 new shared neighbourhoods. I would be grateful for the information on where they have been identified. What does the Minister think is a key feature of a shared neighbourhood scheme?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Very quickly, Minister.

Mr McCausland: One of the key things might be actually getting people from both communities to buy into it.

I point out the example of Springfarm to the Member. Invitations were sent out across the Province, and it was a very slow process to get people to buy into it. I am aware of some small schemes that have worked, but they were specialised and in particular locations. It is right that we should be aspirational, which is the First Minister and deputy First Minister's point. We should be aspirational, but the reality also needs to be kept in mind. I remind the Member again —

2.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, your time is well up.

Mr McCausland: We see problems with segregation in private sector housing, so we should not be surprised that it also happens in social housing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for topical questions. We now move on to questions for oral answer that have been listed for the Minister. Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Public Realm Works: Bangor/Holywood

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timeline for the Bangor and Holywood public realm works. (AQO 4675/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Over the past 18 months, my Department has been working with representatives from North Down Borough Council, town centre management and the local community to develop a major public realm scheme for Bangor and Holywood. Those works will address all aspects of street design, including paving, kerbstones, street furniture, lighting and planting. The total value of the works is estimated to be £10 million, with my Department investing £4 million and the council investing £6 million. The design work for each town was completed with the help of many different stakeholders, and the schemes will build on the individuality and unique attributes of each town. A contractor is due to be appointed in December 2013, and construction work in both towns will commence in late March or early April 2014. The Bangor scheme will take two years to complete, and the Holywood scheme will take 12 months. Throughout the construction phase, my Department will continue to work with local representatives and the wider community to keep them fully informed about the programme of works.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for the information. Are he and his Department aware of the alternative plans that have been proposed by local architect Iain Halliday for Bangor town centre? If so, what consideration has been given to those plans?

Mr McCausland: I am aware that an alternative proposal was put forward. In fact, that proposal was considered at an earlier stage, but it would have meant removing vehicle traffic from Main Street in Bangor. That was recognised as being inappropriate. I read the architect's article in the 'County Down Spectator', and, as I said, the project board considered his proposal. However, it was discounted because the removal of vehicle traffic from Main Street would have had a dramatically adverse impact on traffic flows. That is an important issue that I am sure local traders and residents will be concerned about.

Mr Weir: Will the same standard of materials and designs be used for the proposed Queen's Parade scheme that the Department is taking forward?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the question. Yes; my Department will ensure that the specification for the Queen's Parade scheme ties in with the public realm works in Bangor. The Queen's Parade scheme represents a tremendous opportunity for Bangor. We are driving it forward as a scheme, and the two need to mesh so that Bangor gets the best outcome.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for outlining the timeline and costs. Will he advise when details about the scheme will be available — for example, the types of trees, the pavements, the decorations, the lights and all that infrastructure?

Mr McCausland: Let me run over the timeline that I gave in response to the question. I said that the contractor is due to be appointed in December 2013. Construction work starts in late March or early April 2014. I confirmed that there has been contact with local representatives and the wider public to keep them fully informed about the scheme. That will continue, so the fine detail about trees or what types of flower will be in a flower bed will be discussed at a local level. I am sure that the Member will be part of the wider consultation with those who are designing the scheme and taking it forward. I assume that the Member has already had some input and discussion with them, and I encourage him to continue that, because those things can naturally evolve even as the scheme is being taken forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members who wish to be called for a supplementary that they must continue rising in their place.

I call Mr Trevor Lunn. Sorry, Mr Trevor Lunn is not in his place. I call Mr Ian McCrea. Mr Ian McCrea is not in his place. Question 4 was withdrawn. I call Ms Bronwyn McGahan, who is in her place.

Accommodation

5. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will encourage business people to convert the empty parts of their properties into living accommodation in towns and cities. (AQO 4679/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the question. In 2012, I commissioned a high street task force to review

the support provided by my Department to town and city centres to see whether that could be further strengthened. The task force report was published in February 2013 and contained seven recommendations for my Department.

The report commended the Living over the Shop (LOTS) scheme as an example of a programme that should, through my Department, be extended, with a focus on regeneration-led town centre living to bring after-hours vitality to the high street. My Department's new urban regeneration and community development policy framework establishes town and city centre regeneration as a policy priority, and the housing strategy sets out my intention to revitalise the Living over the Shops initiative and ensure synergy with our mainstream urban regeneration initiatives.

Housing can play an important role in helping to diversify and re-energise our town and city centres. The development of a regeneration-led approach will help to bring people back to town centre living and could have an added-value dimension by bringing vitality to Northern Ireland's high streets after normal trading hours to help to promote the evening economy. It was called the LOTS scheme, but I think that we will be looking for an alternative name, because we want a scheme that is broader than simply living over the shops.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Has he considered the impact on commercial businesses when part of a business area is turned into a housing area?

Mr McCausland: I would be interested to know what concerns the Member has in that regard. The Member has not raised them with me in the past, but I would be happy to hear them. Across the British Isles, there are many town centres in which commercial and residential accommodation fit together. It depends very much on the nature and style of the accommodation. I remember the difficulties in Belfast some years ago when there was a block of apartments above a hot food takeaway, which tended to attract people from a bar nearby in the early hours of the morning. The conflict there was between residents and the noise and disruption associated with the business. It is dependent on the type and the place, and that is why we have planning laws — to make sure that we get the right result, hopefully.

Mr Anderson: What grants are available to target derelict or vacant town centre properties to help to bring them back into productive use, or to enhance the commercial viability of existing properties?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the question. The reference is to the urban development grant (UDG) scheme, which was developed to encourage private sector investment in towns and cities by offering financial assistance to bring into use vacant sites or buildings that were derelict or underused. UDG assistance can be up to 35% of grant-eligible costs for owner-occupier schemes, or up to 35% of total development costs for investment schemes. The applicant provides the remainder of the capital through private funds or bank loans. The regional development office has offered grant assistance on a number of UDG applications that included the creation of new accommodation in town centres.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Minister's intent to improve upon the Living over the Shop initiative. If he has not

already done so, will the Minister give a commitment to write to the Minister of Finance about the possibility of zero VAT or VAT refunds for those who renovate properties, particularly in town centres, so that that is made a more attractive proposition?

Mr McCausland: I have no doubt that the Finance Minister reads every last word of questions for oral answer every day. I am sure that he will take up the Member's point and that he will listen to it and give it consideration. I am also sure that he will be aware that she raised that point today.

Mr Dickson: Many properties above shops do not have separate entrances at street level. I am thinking of two areas in my constituency — Main Street in Larne, and High Street and West Street in Carrickfergus. Does the grant scheme extend to providing for that?

Mr McCausland: I said in an earlier answer that we are looking to develop a new scheme. If individual Members have issues that they want to raise, we would welcome those suggestions. I appreciate the Member's point. Quite often, shops that previously had a side entrance to upstairs have, over the years, removed that to extend the shop frontage. You can see examples of that in Royal Avenue in Belfast, where maybe six storeys above shops are virtually inaccessible other than from the rear. The right outcome depends on the location, but I welcome that the Member is generally supportive of the initiative. I will certainly take an interest in his point.

Housing Executive

6. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Social Development, given that contractors identified in connection with the alleged £18m overpayment on planned maintenance have been barred from receiving any new contracts, what action was taken in respect of the successive directors of design and property services who oversaw Northern Ireland Housing Executive contracts during the relevant time. (AQO 4680/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question. As I previously advised the House, the Housing Executive has appointed an external consultant to independently review the alleged overpayments. The Housing Executive is still awaiting their report. The chairman of the Housing Executive stated in June that the investigation would specifically review how the situation arose, the reliability of the information on overcharging and the actions that were taken to recover the overpayments. Since the report was commissioned not by me or my Department but by the board of the Housing Executive, I will, of course, expect to be briefed on the Housing Executive's findings in due course. The Housing Executive has advised that it is continuing to work with the contractors to reach an agreement on the quantum of any overpayment. When that work is complete, the Housing Executive will consider what further actions, if any, are required.

Mr Allister: I direct the Minister back to the question, which was: given that four contractors have been blocked from further contracts as a consequence of the alleged £18 million saga, what action was taken in respect of the Housing Executive directors who oversaw that alleged situation? How is it that one of the primary directors in charge went on, in fact, to become chief executive? The Minister, in collaboration with the chairman of the Housing Executive, was able to secure a blockage on the four

contractors getting further work. In collaboration with the Housing Executive —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: — did he take any steps to penalise the directors who were in charge?

Mr McCausland: I want to correct the Member. I did not stop contracts being taken forward. The Member is well aware that this is entirely a matter for the Housing Executive. So, I welcome the opportunity to correct Mr Allister and to set the record straight. I hope that he is now better informed about the situation.

As regards the people who are involved in this problem, whether on the contractor side or the Housing Executive side, the Member is aware — because I have just said it — that a report has been commissioned by the Housing Executive, and it is looking into the matter. The chairman of the Housing Executive took that matter forward, and the report will be with us fairly soon, or rather, it will be with the Housing Executive fairly soon. My expectation is that it will be with the chair of the Housing Executive within the next number of days. When the Housing Executive has had the opportunity to review that, it will take whatever action it thinks, as a board, is appropriate in due course. It is important that we distinguish between the role of the Department and the role of the Housing Executive; so, I truly welcome the opportunity to set the record straight and to correct the Member.

2.30 pm

Mr Copeland: Given the fact that a number of companies are disbarred from applying for contracts due to overcharging or overspending, depending on how you look at it, and should the scale of the alleged activities prove to be less than previously anticipated, does the Minister accept that there is a likelihood, at some stage, that companies who found themselves disbarred on that basis will feel slightly unjustly treated and seek recourse in law, and challenge contracts that might be issued during the period of their disbarment? Does he feel that there are any necessary contingencies in the Executive or the Department to deal with that?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I remind all Members that supplementary questions have to be brief and have to relate to the original question.

Mr McCausland: I think that it is important to repeat again that the Housing Executive commissioned external consultants — Campbell Tickell — to produce a report and take forward that piece of work. In advance of the receipt and examination of that report, it is premature for anyone to set out all sorts of potential eventualities. It was stated at the time that the initial figure produced and given out publicly by the chair of the Housing Executive, and which I then reported to the House, was estimated, by means of an extrapolation from samples taken, to be in the region of £18 million. I said at the time that it may be a bit less than that, but it does not matter to me whether it is £2 million, £5 million, £10 million or £18 million: it should not happen.

Mr D Bradley: When does the Minister expect the report to be published, so that we will know the actual accurate figure?

Mr McCausland: I have said already, in answer to a previous question, that we anticipate, from information

provided by the Housing Executive, that it will have the report within a matter of days. It will then want to take that to its board. We are into the month of October, and the board meeting is normally towards the end of this month; but if the report raises very substantial issues — and it may well do so — the Housing Executive will want its board to meet earlier in the month, because this is a matter of concern to the general public, politicians, contractors, and the Housing Executive. Therefore, it will be a matter of the Housing Executive bringing the report to its board as soon as possible. I have not seen the report yet, but I expect to be briefed in due course on the findings and on what action will be taken, and I assure the Member that, whatever the outcome, it will be relayed to this House.

Ms P Bradley: Will the Minister tell us the position regarding the letting of new maintenance contracts?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that a number of planned schemes were let under the current arrangements prior to 27 January 2013.

Those schemes are ongoing, and it is hoped that they will be complete by the end of the year. Once procurement procedures are completed, new contracts will be let.

Work Capability Assessment

7. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the independent review of the work capability assessment carried out by Dr Paul Litchfield. (AQO 4681/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Dr Litchfield's fourth independent review of the work capability assessment has not yet been completed. He is at the evidence-gathering stage of his review, which includes considering whether more can be done to ensure that the assessment process is effective and perceived as objective by all stakeholders. As part of that process, I launched a call for evidence in Northern Ireland on 10 July 2013. That gave everyone with an interest in how the work capability assessment process operates the opportunity to submit their views and comments on how it could be improved. There were a total of 48 responses from interested parties in Northern Ireland. That evidence has now been collated and passed to Dr Litchfield for consideration.

I met Dr Litchfield during his visit to Northern Ireland on 18 and 19 September as part of his evidence gathering. He advised that Northern Ireland's operational processes appeared to operate better than those in Great Britain. I found it encouraging that his assessment was that we were doing it better in Northern Ireland than the folks in Great Britain. In addition to meeting me, he met members of the Social Development Committee, Social Security Agency staff, Atos Healthcare and customer representative groups. His independent report will be laid before the Assembly by the end of the year.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. As the Minister is aware, there is a lot of concern regarding the assessment process. Can he reassure us that protections have been put in place to ensure that people are treated properly during and after the assessment?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the point that he raises. One of the key things to bear in mind is that Dr Litchfield's report is the fourth. There were three

prior to that taken forward by Malcolm Harrington, who is also an occupational health specialist. All the recommendations made by Professor Harrington have been implemented. It is because of the implementation of those recommendations and the initiatives taken forward internally in the Department that we in Northern Ireland have a better arrangement than across in GB. Whatever emerges from Dr Litchfield's report will also be taken forward. I want this to be done in a way that ensures that we have an appropriate and empathetic system in Northern Ireland that is right for our circumstances.

Mr Eastwood: Has the Minister communicated the very specific details and circumstances of Northern Ireland compared with GB, given that we have so many people who suffered horrendous injuries as a result of the Troubles?

Mr McCausland: There are circumstances that are particular to Northern Ireland and different, to some extent, from GB. We have higher levels of mental illness than Great Britain. There are areas in England that have a similar profile to Northern Ireland, such as heavily industrialised areas in the north of England, but, nevertheless, the Member is right: we have a legacy in Northern Ireland of people who were the victim of terrorist violence down through the years. It is important that their interests are safeguarded.

In a different context, when Lord Freud was over and we were discussing welfare reform generally, I made a point of bringing the Victims' Commissioner and several victims to meet him. That meeting was very productive and was well received by those who had been a victim of terrorist violence and the commissioner. So, we have a very good relationship there. It was interesting because two victims came: one who had suffered in the Abercorn bombing way back in the early part of the Troubles and another who had been injured in a bombing much later on in the Troubles. That meeting was very helpful. We will have the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, whether in respect of mental health or the Troubles, very much in mind.

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister outline the training undertaken by the health professionals who conduct the medical assessments?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question. Once recruited, healthcare professionals undergo training targeted to the benefit areas they work in. They are then subject to audit and only have their appointment confirmed when they have consistently achieved four A-grade reports. Ongoing monthly national audits are carried out using an agreed sample size that has been approved by the Department. New entrants are provided with a personal training plan within three months of their formal approval, and they receive anti-discrimination and mental health training in their first year. Atos Healthcare is obliged to develop and deliver a professional training programme for continuing professional development as part of its contract, and that programme is developed, delivered and evaluated annually. A training needs analysis is carried out to identify training needs and priorities and is provided to the Social Security Agency by 1 April each year. Once the outcome of that has been agreed with the agency, an outline training plan is produced by 1 June, giving an overview of the training programme for the coming year. Atos is also required to audit areas relevant to training modules undertaken to ensure that the principles of training have translated into good practice — there is no

point in having had the training unless it is worked through in practice — and to summarise those results in an annual report.

Social Housing

8. Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development whether he is aware that MLAs are not informed about social housing building projects until it is contractually too late to have any meaningful input to the decision-making process. (AQO 4682/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question because I absolutely agree with him. It is disgraceful that certain housing associations do not properly consult MLAs and locally elected representatives. The concern that the Member has raised has been raised by other elected representatives, and it is one that I can well appreciate. It is imperative that housing associations consult MLAs and locally elected representatives before any scheme is finalised.

Housing associations are required by the 'Housing Association Guide' to ensure that adequate structures are in place to consult all appropriate stakeholders, including prospective neighbours, when considering new projects and purchases of property or land, irrespective of how those purchases are funded. The consultation exercise must be appropriate to the type and scale of the scheme proposal and conducted in a time frame that allows for real engagement and the resolution of issues. The 'Housing Association Guide' suggests that that should be a minimum of six weeks. Furthermore, consultation is a prerequisite for scheme and grant approval by the Housing Executive.

Typically, associations may choose to write to MLAs, councillors and neighbours to advise of development proposals. However, I am not happy with that, and I plan to do some work on the 'Housing Association Guide' as to whom housing associations must consult when they consider a scheme for development. There are some examples of housing association good practice in this, but I want to ensure that there is consistency of approach across the sector. They may, if appropriate, follow up with public meetings, and that would be useful as well.

Genuine and earlier consultation is critical to the success of social housing schemes. If the Member has specific evidence of housing associations not undertaking consultation as required in the guide, I ask that he provides that information to my officials, who will investigate it.

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

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. I can give him good and bad examples of consultation by housing associations. Who approves the consultation process with housing associations?

Mr McCausland: The consultation policies and procedures used by housing associations are approved by the board of each of the housing associations. Housing association staff are required to advise their organisation's development committee of the outcome of each consultation exercise. However, as I indicated in the initial answer, it is a matter that I have taken a particular interest in because of issues that have been raised. We are determined to take forward some work in that regard to ensure that, when a grant is being given out, it is in response to the needs of a scheme that has been well consulted on. One of the points here is that local elected

representatives bring a breadth and knowledge of the local situation that people in a housing association that may well be based many, many miles away do not have. The MLA or councillor will be working in that area day by day, week by week, year after year. They will have built up a body of knowledge about the area, and they know the local communities. That advice should be sought. It is wrong if a housing association does not seek that local knowledge in order to benefit from it.

2.45 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Development Programme

1. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the next rural development programme is due to start in January 2014, whether she agrees that to minimise delay, reduce delivery delay, make for a smooth transition and get money on the ground speedily, it is imperative that the current clusters and local actions groups are retained. (AQT 151/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Obviously, it will be our intention to make sure that we are able to spend when we have our new allocation of funding. We do not have the final amount yet, but obviously, when we do and we have our systems and programmes in place, we will want to get that spend out as quickly as possible. You will be aware that the new programme is currently out to consultation. As part of that, we have to look at the current structures, how they have worked and whether they have been effective in the past and, obviously, learn from any examples that we can take from that. That is the job of work over the next number of months. It will certainly be my intention to make sure that we spend effectively and quickly and to ensure that we have systems in place, in practice, to be able to go as early as possible.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her answer. Further to the rural development programme 2014-2020, will the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) place more emphasis on the LEADER initiative to ensure that we take advantage of the higher co-financing rate and, thus, reduce the finance required through our national funds?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, we are out to consultation, and everything is up there. I am very open-minded about taking cognisance of all of the feedback that we get as part of the consultation. There are very clear examples and lessons to be learned from the current programme, and there are ways in which we can improve things, but I am very much wedded to the LEADER approach. It is the best method, but, as I said, I am happy to listen to all the views as part of the consultation.

Farming: Financial Assistance

2. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, given the financial difficulties that arose in the farming community as a result of the bad weather last spring and the fodder crisis that ran alongside

it, she has any plans to bring forward various farm payments, such as the single farm payment and others, to ease the financial circumstances faced by farmers; and whether she can confirm that all hardship and fodder crisis payments have been made. (AQT 152/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. The start of the year, with the snow, was a particularly bad time for the farming community. Then we had the issue with fodder and the fodder crisis, and we had to establish the fodder task force, which, in my opinion, has worked very effectively. At the time, we dealt with the initial problems and were able to get hauliers and transport in fodder that we were able to distribute to the farming community. That task force has met four times and has agreed that it will meet as and when required over the next number of months. It has very much been involved in planning for the winter ahead. We have had a good summer with a good growing season, and we are in a positive position at this moment, but who knows what the winter will bring? We are very open. We have been working with farmers in preparing for the winter ahead, and that is a key area of work, given the winter that we have just come through.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Dr McDonnell for a supplementary question. I remind Members that it is one question only.

Dr McDonnell: Sorry. Can the Minister confirm whether all hardship payments have been made and whether future payments or payments due shortly will be brought forward?

Mrs O'Neill: The majority of hardship payments have been paid. There are a very, very small number — I am talking single figures — who, for some technical reasons or bank reasons, have not been paid. The majority — 99.9% — have been paid. With regard to getting support out to farmers, I was happy yesterday to announce that, because of the exchange rate advantage that we were able to avail ourselves of this year, we have been able to add an extra £16 million to the single farm payments for this year. That is real money in the pocket of the farmer, so it has been very much welcomed. It is my aim to get the maximum number of payments out in December.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members not to talk unnecessarily and to allow the Minister to answer the questions.

Snow Crisis: Cost

3. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she can confirm the cost of the support, including British and Irish helicopter assistance, received during the snow crisis at the beginning of the year, which affected much of the North, and in particular my constituency of North Antrim. (AQT 153/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As the Member has rightly said, we needed the assistance of the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Irish Air Corps during the heavy snow. At my request, they provided helicopter support that allowed us to get much-needed fodder onto the hills and into hard-to-reach areas. I am pleased that they were both happy to come forward with that support. At this point, I am pleased to confirm that the Irish Government have said that they will not ask for any reimbursement for the cost of their helicopters. However, the Department has received a bill of around £640,000 from the British MoD.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. That is a significant cost to the DARD budget. Given that the British MoD charges in such circumstances, would the Minister, for future planning, consider availing herself only of resources for which costs are waived, especially in humanitarian circumstances such as this?

Mrs O'Neill: It was an emergency situation, and the use of the helicopters was an absolute must. It was positively welcomed by the farming community and was a necessary lifeline to get feed to livestock. Obviously, it costs money to run a helicopter, but the fact that the Department has a bill for £640,000 would make me think about where I would look for support if I needed to ask for it in future. I am happy to confirm that I am challenging the bill with the British MoD. I have written to the MoD asking it to waive the bill, given that it was an emergency situation. If we found ourselves in that situation in future — I hope that we will not — costs would be a factor in the services that we would deploy.

Rural Development Programme

4. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what the implications are for the rural development programme of the British Government's decision not to seek additional EU funding for pillar 2. (AQT 154/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From the start, I always said that I was disappointed that, when it came to the overall EU budget, the British Government went to the negotiating table with a negative view, calling for a reduced budget. That was discussed at Westminster, and the parties on the opposite Benches agreed with that position. That said, we do not yet have a final settlement for the rural development budget, but we are of the view that it will be a reduced budget. We face a reduction of about 22%. That will be an issue for us in the time ahead. The implications of that are that we will have to be very effective in how we design the new programme and how we spend the reduced budget. Obviously, there are needs in the industry. We have environmental needs, and rural communities have needs. As I said, we are out to consultation and want to hear views from as many people as possible who have had experience of the rural development programme, know the benefits of it and the areas in which things can be improved. I am happy to look at all that in the round.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. Does the Minister envisage that rural community-based organisations that provide basic services will be included in the new programme?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. To date, the bottom-up approach has been very good, and communities have come forward with their ideas. The best way to do business and to spend the rural development programme's budget effectively is for them to ask for support for their ideas. In moving forward, I welcome some of the priorities that the EU has identified, particularly around tackling poverty. I am keen to make sure that we are able to bring something forward in that area and in new areas of support such as R&D. Research and development and innovation funding are very helpful, particularly if we are looking towards a more competitive and balanced food chain. We need to work on a number of areas. As I said, we are out to consultation, and I want to hear people's views.

We can point to excellent successes, particularly the strategic projects. I visited some excellent projects, particularly over the summer when I had a chance to get out and about. If we are serious about sustaining rural communities and creating thriving rural communities, the rural development programme has to deliver for the rural community in its entirety.

China Visit

5. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how successful she believes her recent trip to China to have been. (AQT 155/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I returned on Saturday evening. I was there last week at the invitation of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and it was a very effective visit. I was guest speaker at the fourth Sino-European Agricultural Conference, and that was my primary reason for the visit. When I was there, I took the opportunity to secure meetings with those in government charged with processing export certificates. It was important to get that meeting, particularly in relation to pork. My visit also afforded me the opportunity to enhance the links that we have created with China, so I have to say that it was very useful.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. Does she think that these trips and the contacts that she makes while there are useful?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely do. At the recent Balmoral show, one of the things that the industry was calling for was for the Executive to get involved in these trips — to go out and seek business, build relationships and enhance existing relationships. This trip was another part of that. One of the most successful aspects of the trip was that the Chinese Government will now prioritise our export certificates for pork. The pork industry has been calling for that, so that was a very effective outcome.

I made my keynote speech to over 100 delegates from across Europe, so we were able to create relationships across Europe and with the Chinese Government. I was able to clearly put out the message that we have high standards of traceability, fantastic food safety and a wholesome agrifood industry. That was all very beneficial and helped us to build on the links that OFMDFM commenced last year on its visit to China. The Chinese are very much into building and enhancing relationships. That is how they do business, and that is how we will get into that market.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Jonathan Craig is not in his place.

Single Farm Payments

7. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what the ramifications for the agricultural community are if 50% upfront single farm payment grants are not paid in October, and what she believes can be done to rectify the problem. (AQT 157/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Member refers to part payments. As I have said previously to the House and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, my objective is to finalise and pay as many single farm payments as we can in December. Last year, we paid over 82% in December, and I want to improve on that figure this year.

I recognise the importance of trying to get as big a payment to farmers as quickly as possible, and I want to be in the position to make advance payments in the future. Unfortunately, we are not in that position at the moment because of the difficulties that we have had with Europe over our mapping system. That is where the priority work has been over the past wee while, but we have made improvements that will allow us, as quickly as possible, to get to the position in which we can make advance payments. In particular, we will increase the number of inspections carried out using remote sensing. We went from 250 last year to 1,140 this year, so that is quite an improvement. We are also encouraging more online applications, which allows us to process applications quickly. A combination of all those things will get us to the position in which we are able to make advance payments as quickly as possible. I assure the Member that my priority for this year is to process the maximum number of payments and get the maximum amount of money into farmers' pockets by December.

Mr Byrne: Is the Minister content that officials are doing everything in their power to make sure that the mapping problem is solved?

Mrs O'Neill: I am content that I am putting enough pressure on officials so that they know that I want the mapping system to be completely up to speed, up to scratch and acceptable to Europe. I am content that I am fulfilling my role in making sure that that pressure is applied. I am also content that they are working very hard. Remapping 750,000 fields is a massive piece of work, and we have to accept that.

We have made progress, although there is a way to go. The Department continues to work with Land and Property Services on field parcels, and we are working our way through that. I think that you will see even more improved maps this year. When our maps are right, when we continue to increase the number of inspections by remote-control sensing and when we have more people coming forward with online applications, we will be in a position, very quickly, to bring forward advanced payment.

3.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends topical questions. We will move on now to questions for oral answer. I advise Members that questions 2, 11 and 15 have been withdrawn.

Land Parcel Identification System

1. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the number of errors within the new mapping system, whether these errors have been satisfactorily rectified. (AQO 4690/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. I am now confident that I have in place a mapping system that, first and foremost, is compliant with the European Commission's regulatory requirements on providing a maximum eligible area for each field parcel. More detailed work is now under way on some key areas requiring attention, such as the mapping of common land parcels and the updating of older orthophotography. Early difficulties with missing fields have been resolved, although it is always the case that there can be individual instances where inaccuracies have to be resolved. It remains the claimant's responsibility to bring those inaccuracies or other changes to the Department's

attention. A significant update to maps will occur at the beginning of 2014, but it will always be important for farmers to remain vigilant, to check their maps and to ensure that they are updated. I have always said that this is a two-way partnership between the Department and the farmer.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does that mean that payments can and will be processed and out any way early and that this process has been successful? We are aware that, in the past, it has dragged on for some time before some farmers received their single farm payment.

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, I intend to make sure that we pay out the maximum amount of money and pay the maximum number of farmers in December. That is the target for this year. A lot of work is going on in the Department, particularly on the mapping exercise and making sure that it is fit for purpose, appropriate and acceptable to Europe. We have made a lot of progress on that. My priority for this year is to get the payments out as early as possible. We made 82% well within the target for December last year. However, I would like to go even further this year and to have more money out and more farmers paid in December.

Mr McAleer: Will the Minister elaborate slightly on the single farm payment and the claims?

Mrs O'Neill: Of the 37,585 single farm payment claims submitted in 2012, 98.6% were finalised by 30 June last year. A total of £243.4 million had been paid out, and that was 99% of the total estimated value of the 2012 claims. The Commission requirement to pay at least 95.24% of the 2012 budget by 30 June was met in early April 2013. I intend to publish the payment timetable for this year in November. It will clearly set out the targets for this year, which will be the targets for December, January, February and right through. As I said, my aim is to pay the maximum number of farmers the maximum amount of money as quickly as possible in December and to improve on the percentage that we achieved last year.

Fuel Poverty: Rural Areas

3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will take additional measures to tackle fuel poverty in rural areas. (AQO 4692/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am concerned about the impact of rising fuel costs, particularly on the vulnerable in rural areas, who are limited in the choice of fuel that they can avail themselves of and do not have access to cheaper alternatives such as mains gas. Addressing fuel poverty is, therefore, a key objective in the financial poverty priority area for intervention, which is detailed in DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework.

The warm homes scheme is DSD and the Government's primary tool in tackling fuel poverty. My Department has collaborated effectively with DSD in the past and has provided supplementary funding to the warm homes scheme, ensuring that many vulnerable rural households that otherwise would not have been supported received much needed home energy efficiency measures such as insulation and central heating systems. I am committed to continuing that support for the incoming winter. My Department has also provided supplementary funding support to the Power NI free insulation scheme, which

also installs insulation packages to low-income rural households.

I remain committed to taking action to address the challenges facing people who live in rural areas and to improving their quality of life. I will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that action is taken to target fuel poverty in rural areas.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer thus far, but will she provide more detail of the outcomes of her work in tackling fuel poverty in rural areas?

Mrs O'Neill: We have been successful in the work done to date under the previous anti-poverty framework. In 2008-09, 700 rural homes received insulation and central heating systems through DARD providing £380,000 of top-up to the Department for Social Development's warm homes scheme. That ensured £3 million of the DSD spend that would not otherwise have occurred.

During 2009-2010, DARD collaborated with the DSD and NIE Energy, providing £250,000 to fund the insulation of 300 low-income rural homes that could not be supported through the warm homes scheme. During 2010-11, DARD worked with the DSD and the warm homes scheme implementation agents to assist the targeting of hard-to-reach rural dwellers. DARD also increased the number of rural referrals to the DSD warm homes and insulation schemes through the maximising access to grants, benefits and services project.

Building on the success of the previous anti-poverty framework, DARD provided £23,000 of top-up to the DSD warm homes-plus scheme and grants for four hard-to-treat rural properties in 2011-12 through the current tackling poverty framework. DARD also provided £390,000 in 2011-12 to supplement the Power NI free insulation scheme, which was also supported through the sustainable energy programme. DARD funding resulted in an extra 578 vulnerable dwellers benefiting from the loft and cavity wall insulation scheme. Last year, DARD provided £224,000 to supplement the Power NI free insulation scheme again. That intervention resulted in an extra 323 vulnerable rural dwellers benefiting from the scheme. There has been a lot of positive work, and I want to continue to do more of it.

Mr Campbell: The warm homes scheme is excellent, and many people have benefited from it. However, will the Minister outline what she is doing on supplementary assistance to the scheme to ensure that people, particularly those in rural areas who do not have broadband access, have knowledge of the scheme and access to it?

Mrs O'Neill: That is a valid idea: if people do not know about it, they cannot benefit from it. For me, the benefit of the money was that it was mainly leverage money. We are able to attract more money from DSD because DARD is putting forward something to enhance DSD's scheme. The cost of insulating a rural property with solid walls because of its age is usually more than the maximum £6,500 that DSD can provide. For me, this is a key and necessary area of support, but I will certainly look at how we advertise this and get the message out. That is key. I know that we use rural community centres and GP surgeries, but I will take another look to make sure that we get that message out effectively.

Mr McNarry: The Minister said that she is concerned about fuel poverty, and I do not doubt her. Why, then, is she taking an ideological stand on something that could ease fuel poverty for all of us in Northern Ireland, namely fracking? Is that an indication that she will be more content to release departmental land for wind turbines?

Mrs O'Neill: It is fair to say that the process of fracking has not been proved to be safe. If the Member has information to suggest otherwise, he should come forward with it. What I said in the media this week was that there is considerable potential for DARD lands to provide sustainable and environmental benefits and to look at renewables. I am totally committed to looking at all those things and assisting rural communities where possible regarding the add-on benefits that those can give to them. In my opinion, fracking poses —

Mr McNarry: That is your opinion.

Mrs O'Neill: It is my opinion that counts. In my opinion, fracking causes a real risk to farming and rural communities. I will make sure that that is the ethos that is carried through during my term at the Department. I think that, if fracking were to go ahead in any part of this island, it would cause international damage to the reputation of Ireland as a whole, to our environmental practices and to the clean and green image that we have. That is the position that I have adopted.

Mr McNarry: Shame.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Whatever you feel about fracking, I am not happy about people shouting from a sedentary position.

Mr McNarry: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Ash Dieback

4. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on ash dieback disease. (AQO 4693/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: By 25 September this year, inspectors had visited 887 sites and found only nine new cases of Chalara infection. Together with the 77 cases found during 2012, 86 sites have been declared infected. In all cases, the source of infection was young trees planted since 2006. Scientists advise that there is a significant risk that the disease may spread from young ash trees to older trees and hedgerows through the release of spores from infected leaves that have fallen to the ground. Although inspectors found that only a small proportion of trees showed symptoms, they ordered the destruction of over 70,000 associated young planted trees and leaf debris because the disease may be present without obvious symptoms. Scientists also advise that, once the disease begins to circulate in the wider environment through the release of spores, control will become very difficult. Affected ash trees were also destroyed at three trade premises.

In July this year, I jointly launched the all-Ireland Chalara control strategy with Minister Tom Hayes in Dublin. The strategy provides a framework for the implementation of our policy of identification, control and eradication of the causal agents of ash dieback in Ireland.

The EU Standing Committee on Plant Health is considering the legislative action that has been taken by us, the South and Britain and has asked us to show that

our control programme is effective and that we make an application for protected zone status against the disease. Consequently, we will continue our surveillance into the autumn until after leaf fall, because scientific understanding suggests that the conditions for spread in the wider environment probably exist on the island of Ireland.

Mr Hilditch: I appreciate the Minister's answer. It was established that the supplier of the diseased trees to forestry projects in Northern Ireland was traced to certain premises in the Irish Republic. Has any action been taken against those premises or legal advice sought?

Mrs O'Neill: It is not for me to comment on that. As I said, the biggest risk to us with regard to ash dieback is via trade. There are no barriers to trade right across Europe. However, at present, we are looking actively at bringing forward statutory pre-notification. I intend to talk to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development about that over the coming weeks because we need to look at the potential risks. Some of those risks relate to four particular species that we are concentrating on for pre-notification status: ash, oak, sweet chestnut and plane trees.

I have very much taken an all-island approach because we are one island. We need to cooperate. With regard to the efforts that Britain has been involved in, it was at a very different disease stage. It would not have made any sense simply to do what Britain is doing. You have to look at plant health in the same way as animal health: on an all-island basis, with regard to trade and benefits to the island. That is why I launched the all-island strategy with Minister Tom Hayes. The good thing about that strategy is that it can easily be adapted to changing circumstances, so, if we find ourselves with a change in disease risk status, we will be able to adapt it. I keep in regular contact with Minister Hayes on the issue.

Mr Rogers: With regard to the all-island approach, will the Minister detail what discussions she has had with Agriculture Minister, Simon Coveney, on the matter?

Mrs O'Neill: In plant health, the way in which the system works in the Dáil means that Tom Hayes is the Minister who is responsible. I engage regularly with Mr Hayes, and I have done so over the past number of months. As for conversations with Simon Coveney, we have discussed the issue at North/South Ministerial Council level. Currently, because of ash dieback, overall plant health is, obviously, one of the main topics of conversation. We are actively working towards an all-island plant health strategy because the island is one epidemiological unit. We need to work effectively together. In the past, the fortress Ireland approach served us very well.

Fodder Task Force

5. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the fodder task force that was launched in spring 2013. (AQO 4694/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In May, I established a fodder task force to consider the issues facing the livestock industry in the following 12 months and to produce an action plan to mitigate the effects of any potential problems. The fodder task force brought together representatives of ancillary agrifood industries, including feed suppliers, banks and

food processors, together with stakeholder organisations and DARD officials.

In July, task force members agreed an action plan that was published on the DARD website. Over the summer, they have been working together to implement it. They have met four times. Although they do not intend to meet as a group until midwinter, they will get together in the interim if a situation develops and new actions are required.

On 18 September, I met stakeholder organisations representing livestock farmers to listen to their assessment of how well farmers were prepared for the months ahead. It was good to hear that the favourable grass-growing conditions during the summer, coupled with the advice that DARD has been involved in delivering, have ensured that farmers are now better placed to mitigate or avoid a fodder situation in the winter ahead. There are still actions that farmers can take to plan for the winter, and DARD will continue to provide advice and support to ensure that farmers are well prepared. A comprehensive programme of workshops, advisory events and publications will be produced by CAFRE to help farmers stocktake their individual fodder supplies and make the most efficient use of the fodder available. In the longer term, I am actively considering the potential of a land improvement scheme. I believe that the joint approach of government and the agrifood industry, by taking responsibility and dealing collectively with the problems facing the industry, is the most effective approach to ensure that another fodder crisis is averted in the winter ahead.

3.15 pm

Mr Ross: Does the Minister agree that the success of the scheme was largely down to a number of haulage contractors who imported feed into Northern Ireland? Will she ensure that any outstanding money is paid to those contractors without further delay?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree that the scheme's success was because of the partnership approach. All the stakeholders came together, and we were able to establish the task force. I am assured that very close to 100% of the hauliers have been paid. The Department is working through the issues with anybody whose payment is outstanding. We obviously want to pay them as quickly as possible for the vital service that they provided over the past number of months.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Will the Minister indicate to the House what organisations are represented on the task force?

Mrs O'Neill: The success of the task force has been down to the fact that all the key players came together, including the banks, the Ulster Farmers' Union, NIAPA, the Grain Trade Association, the Meat Exporters Association, Dairy UK, NIFDA and Rural Support. I have said in the House before that this has been a difficult time for the farming industry, and we need to put a lot of emphasis on the fact that farmers need a lot of emotional support. Rural Support's involvement was key, and we were delighted that it was also at the table. Part of the discussions were around what assistance it can provide to rural communities and farmers who are struggling financially and practically because of all the problems presented to them over the past, I suppose, 18 to 24 months.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister indicate whether she has given any consideration to examining the amount of land in public or, indeed, private ownership that might be used for fodder? I am sure that, like me, she has noticed that huge swathes of land have gone to waste over many years. Will she bring that matter to the attention of the task force for some innovative thinking?

Mrs O'Neill: That is not an area that the task force looked at, but that it is an innovative way to look at things. I am happy to relay it to the task force. We do not want to see any wastage, so, if we can make hay while the sun shines, that is what we should do.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister set out her reasons for deciding against extending the fertiliser season beyond 15 September, unlike her counterparts in the Republic, as a way to increase fodder stocks?

Mrs O'Neill: We have two very different nitrates action plans in place, and ours is a lot more generous all year round. That is the distinct difference between what the South is doing and what we can do. Ultimately, it is a Department of the Environment decision. That having been said, it is something that I discuss with the DOE. There is not the evidence to suggest that there is enough financial benefit derived to extend the period. The farmer would not get enough growth for the amount that it would cost to spread. We take decisions based very much on scientific evidence, and the fact is that the scientific evidence was not there to support extending the season. Even if we were able to extend the date, it would affect only a relatively small number of farmers. As I said, I will base my decisions on the evidence, and the evidence suggests that there would be no real economic benefit for the farmer.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has indicated that he wishes to withdraw question 6 because it was covered during topical questions. However, I remind Members that questions must be withdrawn by noon. For the record, the Member is not in his place.

Jim Wells is not in his place for question 7, but I assure — *[Interruption.]* Order, please. I assure Members that there is a perfectly good reason for that.

Antibiotics

8. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the use of antibiotics in livestock and poultry production. (AQO 4697/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Antibiotics have been widely used in the livestock and poultry industries across the globe since their discovery more than 50 years ago. They are an important tool in treating animal diseases and thereby aiding in the production of animal products such as milk, meat and eggs. It is important, however, that farmers use antibiotics only when they are needed; keep good records of all antibiotics used and the identity of animals treated; and abide by the recommended withdrawal periods. That, of course, applies to the use of all veterinary medicines.

My Department, along with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, is responsible for implementing controls on the use of veterinary medicines, including residue surveillance and inspection of establishments that produce and market animal feeds and feed ingredients.

The Department is funding a three-year Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute research project on the use of antimicrobials, which, coincidentally, begins today. The project will provide an increased understanding of the issues surrounding antimicrobial resistance and the current use of veterinary antimicrobials here.

In collaboration with DEFRA, the devolved Administrations and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I recently endorsed the five-year resistance strategy, which was published last month. The strategy aims to improve the knowledge and understanding of resistance; conserve and steward the effectiveness of existing treatments; and stimulate the development of new antibiotics, diagnostics and novel therapies. My officials are considering the associated action plan.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware of the public concern about antibiotics given to animals that are in the food chain. Is she aware of any instances when antibiotics have been added at low doses to the feed of otherwise healthy animals to control growth and disease?

Mrs O'Neill: It is not an issue that is on my desk, but I absolutely agree with your first point about concerns. There is a consumer confidence issue. People want to be assured that there have been very tight controls on what they are eating and want to know exactly what they are getting. The recent issues with horse meat have further knocked confidence in our supply chain. So, whilst we have very effective traceability in place, including the management of antibiotics and their administration in animals, and while farmers are, in the main, very responsible with their use of antibiotics, I want to see a more proactive approach to animal disease and animal health. As opposed to always just treating sickness, we should look at production diseases, and there is more of an effort towards that now around BVD. We also need to make sure that there is no underhand use of antibiotics. If the Member is aware of anything in particular, I would be happy to talk to her outside of Question Time.

Round the World Clipper Race

9. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Loughs Agency is involved in the preparations for the return of the round the world clipper race next year. (AQO 4698/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Loughs Agency was a key member of the steering committee for the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in 2012 and has offered its services to Derry City Council in that respect for Clipper 2014. For the Clipper event in 2012, the agency provided sailing taster sessions and facilitated the experience of sail for those who may not otherwise have that opportunity. Other activity included a full moon paddle by canoe along the River Foyle and a seafood festival. The Loughs Agency is exploring opportunities to similarly animate the Foyle with marine tourism activity during Clipper 2014. The marine event platform — or the pontoon — that was constructed in 2012 through the agency's EU INTERREG programme remains a key piece of infrastructure for the Clipper race. Indeed, the Clipper organisers praised that facility as being the best they had availed themselves of anywhere on their voyages around the world. That is positive, and we can be very proud of that.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Everybody in Derry understands the importance of Clipper and, indeed, understands the great work that the Loughs Agency does. Can you outline any other programmes that the Loughs Agency will roll out in the next couple of years?

Mrs O'Neill: The Loughs Agency is very much involved in looking at the whole tourism aspect and what it can do to promote tourism. Aquaculture is another area that it is very interested in, and I am delighted to see that. We should exploit the natural resource that we have, which, in Derry, is very much valued. So, it is involved in doing a lot of that work. It is also engaged very much with the City of Culture, and the agency brings any aspects that it can to make that even more of a success. In addition, the agency had a key role in supporting the angling element to the World Police and Fire Games, so it has been effective in, I suppose, thinking outside the box and engaging with other agencies on how it can best promote the Foyle and surrounding area.

Bovine TB

10. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions have taken place with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine about tackling bovine tuberculosis on an all-island basis. (AQO 4699/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I regularly meet Minister Coveney both in the context of the North/South Ministerial Council and separately, as necessary, to discuss a range of issues, including matters that relate to animal health on the island of Ireland. Under the North/South Ministerial Council arrangements, there is a TB and brucellosis working group comprising key veterinary and policy officials from across the island. It meets two or three times a year to exchange information relevant to the control and eradication of TB, including possible areas of cooperation. In addition, my officials and Minister Coveney's are in regular contact to discuss all aspects of bovine TB.

My Department has a rigorous EU Commission-approved bovine TB eradication plan, which is vital in safeguarding our export-dependent trade in livestock and livestock products, which is valued at over £1 billion each year. The South has similar EU Commission approval for its TB eradication plan. The TB herd and animal testing programmes right across the island comply with the EU trade directive.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for her reply. Are the Minister and DARD committed to a joint North/South approach to tackling bovine TB?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I have an all-island animal health and welfare strategy in place that looks at the whole gamut of animal disease. It is primarily aimed at how we can remove all the barriers to trade, and disease is one of the biggest barriers that we have. We have officials across the island working on that strategy, and Minister Coveney and I regularly engage on it. We also have the upcoming EU animal health and welfare law, which, we believe, will give us the vehicle that will allow us to facilitate the free movement of cattle across the island. To me, the potential benefits of that will be phenomenal to the whole industry on the island, particularly as we attempt to grow that industry.

Mr Elliott: Has the Minister or the Department considered changing the on-farm testing method to trace bovine TB?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member may be aware that I announced on 17 September that I would establish a government/industry partnership to look at the whole area of TB. I said at the time that we needed to look at the whole range of issues again. We have effective work ongoing with our TB eradication plan, which is approved by Europe and allows us to draw down £4 million in funding to help us eradicate TB. I am also going to have the strategic partnership look at the entire issue. We need to look at compensation, the eradication plan that we have in place and the results of the test, vaccinate or remove (TVR) practices that we have, going forward. I am open-minded about looking at everything again to make sure that we do everything that we can. We want to drive out this disease. We want to have a strategy in place, and we need to be open-minded in looking at all aspects of it, including, as I said, compensation, the badger and all the issues in regard to TB. It is a complex disease. There is no quick fix, but, strategically, we have to look at it from that angle.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Rural Development Programme

12. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the new council structures, following the review of public administration, will be taken into account in the rural development programme 2014-2020. (AQO 4701/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's proposals for the next rural development programme are currently out for public consultation. As part of that consultation, we are seeking views on the options for delivery of a future programme. The EU proposals for rural development require a minimum of 5% to be delivered using the LEADER approach. Although seven local action groups were established in the current programme, the review of public administration (RPA) will mean that the LEADER local action groups will be reformed, in line with the new council areas and boundaries.

There would still be an option to cluster councils together in line with the new boundaries, if it was felt that fewer than 11 local action groups would be more cost-effective, easier to administer and there might be greater impact of the funds in the combined area. As I said, these are some of the areas that are out to consultation at the moment and on which I am seeking views.

My Department is not transferring any functions to councils as a result of the RPA. However, I am considering how local government will be involved in the next programme, through the LEADER approach and directly with my Department.

3.30 pm

Mr I McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for not being in my place for Social Development questions. I was in another meeting, and when I got to the back door I heard that I was not in my place. I thought it better not to come in late. I apologise to the House and the Minister for missing the question. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The law about shouting across the Chamber still applies.

Executive Committee Business

Local Government Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill [NIA 28/11-15] be agreed. — [Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment).]

Lord Morrow: When we stopped, I was nearly finished but just not quite. Therefore, I will not detain the House too long. However, there are a couple of issues about the Bill that I would like to bring to the House's attention.

There are not many, no matter what form of society or walk of life they are in, who like change. Somehow, we do not adapt to change very quickly; or at least, at the beginning, we resist it. I think that one of the biggest challenges, or one of the great concerns, for the new administrations when they come into place — others may have touched on it, but I cannot recall who it was — will be the potential disappearance of localism. The existing structures were formed under the Macrory report in 1972 and 1973. When those reforms came into place, there was little lead-in time; it was one way today, and it seemed to be that the new system just appeared and everybody got on with it. However, that is not proposed in this Bill. There will be a time for everybody to get acclimatised, as it were, to the new system. Not everybody fully understands that. Indeed, a lot of people — I would be one of them — feel that it is hardly necessary either, but that is by the way. Maybe it is easy for me to say that since I will not be part of it, but then I came in from the cold to the new system and it was not part of anything.

In their contributions, Anna Lo and Dolores Kelly made great play of the fact that they felt that their parties were, at times, discriminated against and that they did not get their fair share of mayoral positions. Well, let us —

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: I will in a second, after I tell you my story. *[Laughter.]* Does it take them as long to get round to sharing in Mr McCarthy's council as it does in Dungannon? I tell you, it took 36 years for the DUP, which had representation for all those years in the council, to get its shared bit. I do not know whether your council moves as quickly or as slowly as that, but I did say that I would give way, and I will.

Mr McCarthy: Lord Morrow, I am grateful to you for giving way. I was not going to contribute, but I was listening. How would you consider it if a member served on a council for, in my case, 28 years and had applied for a position of deputy mayor and mayor on eight occasions and was never given that opportunity? Yet, I can remember quite clearly one occasion when a DUP man came in following an election and was elected deputy mayor after one year. Do you not think that what is proposed today will eradicate that for the future? I will not be part of it, and you will not be part of it, but at least we will be making progress.

Lord Morrow: You did not do so badly at 28 years. As I said, it took me 36 years to get Dungannon council round to the way that maybe others should be given consideration. If it takes 36 years to make it happen in Dungannon, and it took 28 — I do not think that the Alliance was held out of post for 28 years in your council.

Mr McCarthy: I was.

Lord Morrow: Well now, here we go, you see.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that sometimes when we are talking about these issues a perception emerges, particularly from those who are of a nationalist disposition serving on unionist-controlled councils, that they have, in some way, been frozen out for a long time, and they are looking for some comfort that that will not happen again? This is a two-way street. This morning, Mrs Kelly referred to the Londonderry/Strabane area, where Sinn Féin has taken both the chairman and vice-chairman positions on the transition committee. In addition, if there is a situation in which unionists are 20% of the voters but get 10% of the posts on the transition committee, it is a two-way process. People should not have the perception that it is nationalists who have been disadvantaged from the 1970s until now and that they are looking for a nirvana or promised land. It is a two-way process.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for that point.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member very much for giving way. I am sure that he and Mr Campbell will join me in congratulating Derry City Council for its efforts over the years to involve unionists. Over a term, there are four mayors and four deputy mayors in Derry. Unionists get one mayor and three deputy mayors over the four years, which equates to 50% of the posts.

Lord Morrow: I think that —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes.

Mr Campbell: I cannot let that intervention go. I do not know how to describe it, but it is not accurate. We have to go back only to the mid-1980s, and we all know what happened then when there was a nationalist-controlled council headed by the SDLP. It took decisions that not only marginalised unionists but isolated them for decades. That cannot be covered by saying, "We let you have a mayor the odd year."

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that Members will agree that we really need to get back to the Bill.

Lord Morrow: Mr Deputy Speaker, you pre-empted what I was going to say, which is very similar. Everybody has had the opportunity to air their grievances and points of view on the issue. However, maybe there are lessons to be learned by us all. It strikes me, as I listen to the debate going back and forth across the Chamber, that no side is blameless.

I am sorry to hear of Mr McCarthy's personal tragedy. As you once were, so was I, I can assure you. The only thing is that I had to wait 36 years and you had to wait only 28.

With the changeover, we need to pay particular attention to the part of the Bill that deals with community planning, which will be testing. I can speak with better knowledge about the new council in my area of mid-Ulster, because I have a greater understanding of that area than of others. The mid-Ulster council will take in Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and their hinter parts, which is a very big geographical area. Within that area, there will be sparse populations and big rural hinterlands. If we are going to do anything in the future, new local government will have

to be seen to do what it says. I have a real concern about localism and rural communities feeling somewhat isolated.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

In the past, there was debate about whether to have 11, seven or 14 councils. The debate would have been similar, irrespective of the numbers that we arrived at, so it was never going to be easy. However, I suspect and hope that we will be up for the challenge. I do not envy the task of the new councillors who will be in charge of all this and taking it forward, because it will be a difficult circle to square. It will be difficult to deal with community planning because what might work in a rural area will not work in an urban area. The challenge, therefore, will be how the whole thing dovetails. The Committee will have another opportunity to go into greater depth and make sure that, where humanly possible, all the issues are covered.

Finally, we have paid tribute to local government and to councillors who stood up back in the 1970s during the worst excesses of the Troubles. I would also like to pay tribute to the staff in local government because they, too, were, to a certain extent, on the front line and provided an excellent service. I know that many will not go along with the change. They will probably retire, and we wish them well. Some will go across to the new system, so we have to be sensitive about those changes, too. We should not take staff, who have shown a very professional approach over the years, for granted.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important legislation. The Bill will lead to the transformation and restructuring of local government. It will enable the creation of the 11 new district councils and introduce new governance arrangements, which will protect the rights of all people and provide fair, transparent and effective decision-making. It will allow for a new council-led community plan, a general power of competence and the transfer of a range of functions from central to local government. It will also cater for better partnership arrangements between councils, Departments and the Executive.

Being a public representative on Magherafelt Council for some years, I have experienced at first hand communities' frustrations at the lack of delivery and support for citizens. The Bill is the start of a process that Sinn Féin believes will bring long-term benefits for our people, but that will be done only by ensuring that the proper checks, balances and protections are in place.

I intend to concentrate on some specific aspects of the Bill. Clause 10 covers positions of responsibility. The allocation of internal and external council positions will be through d'Hondt or a similar method, which is to be welcomed. We need a proportionate and fair way of allocating council positions — mayors, chairs and committee memberships — that is accepted by all elected representatives and political parties.

Clause 65 details a code of conduct. With the transfer of the challenging function of planning to councils, there needs to be a clearly defined set of ethical standards to ensure that relationships and interactions between councillors, constituents, applicants, planning officials and other officers and agents are clear and transparent. That is required as much to protect the interests of councillors and officials as it is to ensure probity from the general public.

I welcome clauses 57 to 59 on the commissioner's role and responsibilities in regard to breaches, and I ask the Minister to expand on the cost of the role in his response. I would also like to know whether there will be an appeals mechanism.

I welcome the formalisation of the partnership panel as stipulated in clause 106. I urge that we examine partnership arrangements and methods that are best practice in other jurisdictions in order to learn what is the most effective system with which to achieve the greatest outcomes. It is important, I believe, in addition to giving the 11 new local authorities a voice at the partnership table, that we allow local government to collectively lobby and present their suggestions to the panel through local government associations, as happens in other jurisdictions. A facility or mechanism is needed to allow that to happen on the partnership panel.

I also welcome aspects of the Department's supervisory powers, although there is sometimes a thin line between the potential for departmental interference and the autonomous rights of a local authority to carry on its duties unhindered. We have to be careful to scrutinise these aspects of the Bill to ensure that the correct balance is struck.

I support the principles of the Bill and look forward to Committee Stage.

3.45 pm

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Bill. Like my colleague the Deputy Chair of the Committee, I am new to the Committee in the sense of only just getting sight of a lot of the work that it has been dealing with over the past few years. Nonetheless, I look forward to the Committee's work in scrutinising the legislation — if it gets past today, that is, which I cannot see it not. The Bill is quite large, and there is no doubt that a lot of time will be spent scrutinising it. I certainly look forward to working alongside the Minister and his Department in doing so.

I need to declare an interest as a member of Cookstown District Council. I am proud to say that I am a member of that council. No doubt the Minister has a different opinion on that and is looking to change it, but we will deal with that when we have to. The difficulty of being down the list of Members to speak when you are dealing with a matter such as this is that a lot of Members have referred to similar issues, so it is just a case of rehearsing those. However, like other Members, I will get a chance to do so at Committee when we properly scrutinise the Bill.

I think that all Members are trying their best to ensure that the 10.00 pm finish time is not realised. I will certainly not play any part in getting us anywhere near that. Nonetheless, I think that it is important that we deal with a few issues. My colleague Lord Morrow referred to councils' debts. That issue is very important as we move forward in the process. He was right to refer to the new mid-Ulster council having little debt. Although that new council will have debt of about £2.5 million in comparison with other councils that have debts of £10 million, £20 million, £30 million or £40 million, I do not think that we are in a bad place. It is important that, when we consider the whole process, the ratepayers of the new Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon, or mid-Ulster, council will not have to take on any burden from other councils. That is certainly an important issue for the ratepayers of our new

council area. Although we have low debt, it is not for the want of projects that we have delivered, whether they are capital or other projects. I think that all three councils can certainly beat their chests because of the delivery that we have done on behalf of our ratepayers while keeping a low debt and a low rate base. I think that that is something that we all should be proud of.

A number of functions will be transferred to councils. The important aspect in all that is that there is very little, if any, cost to councils. As other Members said, it needs to be cost neutral. Although many would think that it certainly should not be in year 1, the issue is more that that remains the case in years 2, 3 and 4.

My colleague Lord Morrow referred to community planning, as did other Members. Community planning is no stranger to Cookstown District Council and other councils in mid-Ulster. The challenge for Departments is that they must ensure that they are committed to not only shaping the model but to bringing the finances to the table where needed. That is a very important part of this. Although functions can be transferred, I think that it is very important that Departments send representatives. Mention was made of the possibility of having a chief executive at the first couple of meetings and then having just whoever they can get to go thereafter. That needs to be looked at seriously to ensure that the highest level of representation from Departments, and so on, is in attendance.

It needs to be a bottom-up approach, shaped by councils and the local area, not driven by central government priorities. Councils and people know the issues in their areas. As Lord Morrow referred to, there are issues regarding identity; where the identity in one part of the proposed mid-Ulster council area has nothing in common with that in another part of the council area. If you look at the stretch from Swatragh to Fivemiletown, you will see that, due to the large geographical nature of the proposed council area, there is very little in common between those localities. It is important that, when we deal with community planning, no area gets left out.

The mechanism used to bring partners to the table is also important, and I can think of an example in which our council was able to bring the Department into the council chamber to debate Westlands care home. As a council, we have no real say in how that moves forward.

There is a lot of work to be done in scrutinising the Bill in Committee. I look forward to that. As I said, I will not waste a lot of time debating it today. As we move forward, there will be a lot of work for the Committee to do, and I hope that the Bill passes to the next stage.

Dr McDonnell: On behalf of the SDLP, I support the Local Government Bill. We warmly welcome the work of the Department in getting the Bill to this stage, and I thank our current Minister, Mark H Durkan, and our former Minister, Alex Attwood, for the work that they have done in bringing the Bill before the House.

There are many complex issues involved in the legislation, and we support the Bill, not without some reservations which some of my colleagues will outline as we go through the debate. I emphasise that to have the confidence of local people the new councils must fully reflect and respect their interests.

We welcome the provisions of the Bill that, in law and in practice, require power sharing and proportionality to be applied. Our local politics was once defined by one tradition imposing its will on others. Future politics here must be defined by a legal duty to ensure that bad history does not repeat itself. That, hopefully, will be the order of things in local government in about 600 days from now. That is why those who try to cling to the old and flawed ways of the past are so out of order.

There are some councils where some parties use their weight of numbers to exclude others from proper input in the run down to 2015. Those are councils in which Sinn Féin and the DUP have the weight of numbers, confirming why this problem is not only a lesson of our bad history but is part of the current everyday experience. They use their voting strength to get their way. That is why power sharing, proportionality and fair play must be legislated for.

The SDLP strongly urges those councils that are guilty of bad practice to stop now, rewind, and pull back towards adopting a better practice. To do that will greatly help council reform, build community confidence and help settle our politics a little at this difficult time, when politics generally is so unsettled.

The SDLP recognises that at the heart of this Bill are the efforts to make local government more efficient and more effective in delivering good services for people. Local government is at the heart of every community across Northern Ireland. It is, very often, the first place where people make contact with elected representatives when they try to access local services or raise issues that are affecting them in their everyday lives. That is why it is so important that local government has the capacity to do the best job and provide the best possible service, ensuring the best possible outcome for all the people in a district or community.

However, regrettably, the best possible outcome is not always the result, even when the best of intentions are present. Last December, in Newry, our SDLP councillors, in good faith, joined with their colleagues in voting to reaffirm the name of a play park after an IRA hunger striker. That play park had been named 10 years previously by a vote in Newry council, supported by a broad cross-section of councillors, unionist and nationalist. The play park had been known as McCreesh park for 10 years. The council was satisfied, following the consultation process, which included written responses and a public meeting, that it had carried out an effective equality impact assessment. One of the council's recommendations was the retention of the name. The only material difference from what had been the case for 10 years was to place a new official sign in the place of an old one. I can assure you that the intention of our councillors was sensible and reasonable because, in continuing with the existing name of the park, no other public spaces would be named as such in future.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: No; I am not giving way. I am in the middle of this. In local terms, the decision was understandable but, in wider terms, it was not understood. Our representatives acted entirely in good faith. It was not their thinking or intention to cause any hurt or distress to anyone, yet hurt and distress were caused, and the SDLP — myself in particular — deeply regret that. I know every

one of our members on Newry council. I have grown up in the SDLP with them. They have, for years, been on the right side of decisions on multiple issues of life and politics in Northern Ireland. The SDLP has always stood for what is right, even when some others, brutally and ruthlessly, kept doing what is wrong, again and again.

The SDLP opposes the naming of public spaces and places after people, whatever their background or —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to help the Member. It might be important if the Member could link whatever he might be saying to the Second Stage of the Bill. I am trying to be helpful and to guide the Member, because we are dealing with the principles of the Bill.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you for your comments, Mr Speaker. There is a particular reason why I am mentioning the approach of the SDLP today. Across the 11 new councils, going forward, and in the 26 councils that exist today, there is a multitude of challenges facing us around flags, memorabilia, emblems and the past. We have to accept that good people with the best of intentions can, sometimes, do things that appear to be wrong with hindsight.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: The Member is in full flow here, and I am not in a position to give way. What the SDLP is trying to do is, quite frankly, to draw attention to a mistake that could be made, unintentionally and unwittingly, and to the fact that there were good people doing it, without any intention to cause offence. We will deal with that at our upcoming party conference. We also intend, in the Haass talks process, to attempt to reach a comprehensive outcome, addressing all matters based on respect, equality and parity of esteem, because we feel that it is very important to our local government that, as we approach our new councils, there must be standard laws so that there is not one set of laws for him and one set of laws for her. We should all have a standard set of laws and a standard benchmark, if you like, of quality going into the councils. We ask others to give us what we would expect us to give them.

4.00 pm

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I suppose that there is a lesson in all this for me and others: be persistent.

I listened intently to what Mr McDonnell has said. I do not know whether he is in contrition, denial or confirmation mode. He tells us today that there was no intention to cause offence to anyone. I will take him at his word on that. However, now that you have caused the offence, do you recognise that that was the wrong road to go down, the wrong thing to do and a big mistake to make? Will you rectify the mistake? That is all that I want to ask.

Dr McDonnell: Mr Speaker, I am sorry, but I will give Lord Morrow the Hansard report, because that is exactly what I said. I have no doubt that if he reads my remarks, he will get exactly that from them.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: No, I am sorry. I am dealing with serious issues and want to get on with them.

Mr Weir: It is a serious issue.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not persist.

Dr McDonnell: The opportunity provided by the Haass talks addresses the legacy of the past. Our party will argue for the primacy of the interests and needs of victims and survivors. That shall guide us in the talks.

There is much more that I could say about the conduct of others and of other parties and about how they dishonour victims and survivors and fly in the face of respect, equality and parity of esteem. They say one thing and do the opposite.

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

The points that I am making are not just about McCreesh park in Newry but about how we as a society move forward through the reform of local government and develop the respect that people are entitled to and respect for each other. This is about how we reflect our people and their views, and reflect what they expect from local government. There is a certain disillusionment out there with politics and with how we have conducted business in the recent past. For me, it is all about how we need to reach out genuinely and honestly to each other, embrace reconciliation and create a genuinely shared future for all our children and grandchildren. To me, that should be the purpose of all that we do in our political life.

Mr B McCrea: I suppose, at this stage of the proceedings, it is for us to comment on the general principles of the Bill. Before doing that, perhaps I should respond to the comments of the Member who spoke previously. To those Members who wish to intervene, they are more than welcome to do so, if they want to.

What the Member said outlines many of the concerns over how we are going to do local government. There is the challenge that people will say and do things that are misinterpreted or looked at in a different light by others. I welcome the fact that the leader of the SDLP has addressed the issue in Newry. It is somewhat disappointing that it has taken this time for that to be said, but, nevertheless, in a spirit of reconciliation, I think that the fact that it has been said and an undertaking given that it will be rectified deserves a positive response. I will give him such a response. It is a magnanimous thing to say when you have made a mistake and to come forward and say that you will try to make amends. How those amends are made is, of course, something that we will want to scrutinise. It may well be something that we need to work together on, because different people will have different opinions on it.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. My slight concern is that there was a lack of clarity. Will the Member join me in saying that, when it comes to making amends, there should be a clear statement from the SDLP, from the leader or any other Member, to say that it will be bringing forward a notice of motion seeking to change the name of the play park? I did not get —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members. I remind everyone that we are here to debate the Second Stage of the legislation; we are not here to debate a particular play park. So, I ask Members to put their comments in the context of the legislation.

Mr Weir: In the context of providing parity of esteem and ensuring that there is the feeling of power sharing

in the Bill, which the previous Member who spoke made reference to, does the Member agree that a concrete step would be a clear, unambiguous indication that a notice of motion will be brought by the SDLP seeking to change the name of that play park? It would not rectify what happened in the past, but it would at least show that there is a willingness to change. Rather than simply using words to say there is regret, there would be actual concrete action. Does the Member agree that that is the positive action that is required to rectify this matter?

Mr B McCrea: Following on from that intervention, and with reference to Part 9 of the Bill on the conduct of councillors and Part 10 on community planning, I will respond to the intervention and say that it is my understanding that the leader of the SDLP has given an undertaking that he is not just acknowledging that there was some misunderstanding, which led to offence, but that he intends to address the issue. How he addresses the issue is a matter for the SDLP, but we will look at that, and I take on board the points that the Member opposite made. Nevertheless, the point having been made and counterpoints having been put forward, I think that it is a significant development and one that deserves some sort of proper scrutiny and, at this stage, a positive response from this Bench.

On the general point of the Bill, the question that we have to ask is: why are we bringing this Bill forward at all? This is about the general principles. If the Assembly were overburdened with work, and if it were anxious to clear the decks so that it could do more work, bring forward more legislation and tackle more issues that are properly associated with it, you might have some argument about trying to move some work to the councils. I have to say that that is not the case in this House at the moment. We appear to be trying to devolve dysfunctionality. We appear to be trying to take things that we cannot deal with or issues that we cannot resolve and move them to another area, and I have some concerns about that.

The naming of the park is but one issue, and the flying of the Union flag at all Northern Ireland councils on designated days is another issue that might cause some discussion. I have heard Members here mention the difficulties with the selection of a chief executive, who will be selected and how. There were discussions earlier about how we might allocate offices, whether we should use d'Hondt, and there was an exchange between various councils about how that might work. Those are all significant issues. Underlining them all, and I think that this was the point that Mr McDonnell was making at the start of his speech, is that there is a fear about an abuse of power by a majority, whatever that majority happens to be, and there is some concern from my position about the fact that we are devolving powers to organisations that will be less able to handle those difficult subjects than this body here. Were it the case that this Assembly was working really well, meaning that we were really functional and could say, "here is good practice", there might be an argument to see whether we could do something different in another place.

The key question facing us in the legislation is: if we were to start again, if we were to remove Northern Ireland's orange and green politics from the equation, would we come up with this particular model for reforming councils? When we talked about the number of councils — certainly in my sphere of influence — the discussion was about

whether 15, 11 or six was right. The discussion was not to do with purpose or function. It was to do with who would have majority control and whether these would be orange councils, green councils or whatever. Unfortunately, this entire project — from the 11-council model, to the governance framework, to the financial models and projected savings — has orange and green politics running through it. It is, therefore, policy by negotiation, not policy by evidence. It is policy by barter, not outcomes. It is policy with little focus on the common good.

We are going through the motions rather than trying to do what is best, and that approach provides lowest common denominator policy. At this stage of the Bill, not one Member has made a good, strong case that, under this model of reform, the public will be significantly better off in outcomes, finance or representation.

Why should we devolve the dysfunctionality of this Executive and Assembly to more powerful councils? Perhaps we should put our own house in order first. There is a question to be asked when you look at the functionality of the body politic. In the past, some people have said that we have too many MLAs and that we should look at reducing their number. This question could also be asked: why do we need two tiers of government? Other Members have, quite properly, made the case that, during the Troubles, councils were one of the main democratic institutions left to us. We did not have a devolved Administration. We had MPs, MEPs and councillors. However, we are not there now. We are now in a devolved institution. When you look —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I am always minded to give way to the Lord Morrow. I trust that he will give way to me at future opportunities.

Lord Morrow: I recall only one occasion on which I did not give way, and I must have had a very good reason. Normally, I do give way.

The Member has asked why we need local government. I remind him that when local government was reorganised in 1973 under the Macrory report, Macrory envisaged an Assembly here. To be fair to the Macrory report, local government would have been much more effective, although it was quite effective, and I am not taking away from it in any way. I remind the Member that, under the Macrory report, it was always envisaged that there would be the tier of local government that exists now. It was envisaged that there would be an Assembly here. We now have both, and that was always part of the plan, Mr McCrea. Thank you for giving way.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to Lord Morrow for his intervention. I had purpose in bringing in Lord Morrow. He made an interesting contribution earlier, which I want to address, not in a confrontational way but to pick up on some of the points that he made.

Look at other council models. Birmingham City Council, for example, looks after almost one million people. Some councils in England and Wales have powers over and above what our councils have, including powers over education, social services, planning, waste disposal, recycling and collecting, trading standards, emergency planning, roads, highways and transportation, housing, environmental health, parks, open spaces and

countryside, and markets and fairs. Those councils have to deal with a real amount of work. A Member from the Sinn Féin Benches said that district councils and local councils currently spend only about 5p in the tax-raised pound and that that is wrong.

The counterargument to the principle behind the Bill is: are we really doing this because, some time ago, someone told us that it is something that we should do? All that I hear from around the House are fairly guarded comments from Members who are not really sure that this is the right way forward, that we are doing this because it is a train in motion, and that we have to do it at some stage. I am in concert with Lord Morrow in that I would rather take my time and do it properly than rush it unnecessarily and get it wrong. If there is a proper function to be done, let us address that and see what happens.

4.15 pm

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Having been in this place since the beginning, I think that I am right in saying that the original announcement of the review of public administration (RPA) was made in the year 2000. By the time all this is put in place, that will be a 15-year time frame. As the Member considers that we are rushing it, I wonder how long he feels it would take to give it proper consideration?

Mr B McCrea: I was quoting the Member's colleague Lord Morrow, who said that it was better to get it right than to rush it. So there might be an issue for that to be taken up. For my part, heaven forbid that there would be a split in the DUP —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: Quickly, Maurice. A leadership bid?

Lord Morrow: Thank you for giving way. It is good to keep everything in context. I said what you said I said. However, I said it in the context that some criticism was flowing against Ministers past and present that this took a long time coming. So I said, at that stage, better far to take our time and get it right. I hope that we are getting it right, and it was in that context that I said that.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to Lord Morrow for confirming that he said what I said he said, and, of course, we all know that it is very important not to fall out with the Chief Whip. So we have that sorted.

There are some issues that I would like to bring forward about devolving dysfunctionality. We appear to have dysfunctional boundaries. I know that that is not the particular focus of this Bill, but I want to touch on it briefly before I move on. There are difficulties, and we appear to have constructs that do not fit the natural local environment. The 11-council model creates boundaries that, seemingly, have not taken into consideration current community identity, civic activity or even journeys and routes of travel for the majority of people in different constituencies. There is an example between Castlereagh and Lisburn, and another around south Down. The issue is intensified when we consider one of the key aspects of the Bill, community planning, which is in Part 10, clauses 69 to 86. According to the Local Government Task Force's planning subgroup recommendation paper:

"The aim of community planning is to make sure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in decisions made about the public services which affect them."

and:

"the idea of developing a jointly owned vision for a locality"

seems to be something of a challenge when people are geographically dispersed, not part of one particular community but of several, which reflects some of the difficulties that we have raised. So I have to say that new electoral boundaries, combined with Assembly and parliamentary boundaries, will likely confuse voters at a time of unprecedented political disenchantment. That is an issue.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. I have some sympathy and understanding for what he says in relation to what might be perceived as a disconnect between the boundaries and the new local authorities. However, I am, sadly, old enough to remember 1977, when I joined Carrickfergus Borough Council. Essentially, the same argument was made then. We drew Greenisland, which was part of the former Larne Rural District Council, and Whitehead, which had its own council, into a new borough council, that of Carrickfergus. The description that Mr McCrea has just given was the description that was given then. However, the task for local government was to draw the community out of those areas that were put together as a result of the Macrory report. That is exactly what we were being asked to do some 40 years ago and it is what we are being asked to do today. I think it a good thing, not a bad thing.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. Unfortunately, I do not have his years to be able to remember from 1977 in that regard. However, there is no doubt that there is a challenge in front of us. I am not sure — and this is the purpose of the debate on the Bill — that we are actually ready and able to resolve the issues that are put forward and that the Bill is trying to achieve.

The second area of devolving dysfunctionality is dysfunctional finance. The PwC report of October 2009, referred to already by Members, indicates that there will be expenditure of £118 million over five years and that that will achieve savings of £438 million over 25 years.

It indicates that the operational costs will break even in 2017-18 and that it will take until 2020-21 to get a return on the initial investment. I notice that there were a number of Assembly questions in from Anna Lo about the amount of money that was going to be available to do these things. The problem is that we can be pretty sure that there is going to be an increase in cost, but it is not certain that we will see a reduction in expenditure or efficiencies. That is substantially dealt with in the reporting section of the Bill — I think it is Part 12 — which deals with how we will see whether we will see benefits. I am particularly concerned about that matter.

I will return to some of the points that Lord Morrow brought up when he was talking about debt, which, I think, was a key point. He helpfully produced some statistics about how well certain councils have done. I think that he said that £0.5 billion was the total cost of this. The figure that I have is £459,525,000, so £0.5 billion is correct. I was also

drawn to the figure that Newtownabbey Borough Council has produced. I will also talk a little bit about Lisburn, just to show that there is no unintended bias on the issue.

Lord Morrow: Will you talk about Dungannon, too?

Mr B McCrea: I will talk about Dungannon because I think that the Member has a very fair point.

I looked at the figures for Newtownabbey's current debt. Members who are members of Newtownabbey council will be able to tell me that it is £46,836,936. I stand to be corrected, but I think that that is the figure. What is interesting about that figure is that I looked to see how much the council actually raises in rates and found that the figure is half that; it is £25 million. This is a colossal burden. Lord Morrow made the point that you could offset that with the assets and said that that was, maybe, the right way to do it. The annual general report helpfully states that the council has long-term assets of £85.2 million, but it is not clear that those are actually realisable, because they are land and buildings.

With regard to the audit powers that we are looking at in the Bill, one of the things that is most interesting is that the audit was not qualified, but noted. The report states that one area of difficulty arose during the audit, and it states that the council is required to disclose its fixed assets at fair value. It then states that fixed assets were overstated and that the council had amended its accounts to correct that. The result is a net book value of land and buildings being reduced by £8.1 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have allowed the Member some latitude, but can I draw you back to the main principles of the Bill, please?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, sir, I am dealing with Part 12, as I indicated to you, which deals with performance improvement and how we might deal with these issues.

I will put the comparison about the sort of audit support that we need because this is a very important issue. I looked at two points on this because this is a serious issue. I looked at the cost of servicing that debt. Newtownabbey finances that sum of money at £5.5 million per annum. That is a fairly significant sum. Interestingly, when we look at Lisburn, which has a mere £25 million of debt, we see that it has to spend only £2.5 million on servicing debt. When you take that as a percentage of the amount of rates that you bring in, it is a significant proportion. The point about this moving across and whether we should do it is: if we consolidate these issues, there will be, in my opinion, an increase in rates in the longer term. The biggest single problem that we have with this is that we will be devolving activity and responsibility without taking care of the financial issues. Even if there is short-term funding to get us over the hiccup, there will be —

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I am trying to be careful because I appreciate what the Member is saying about the funding issue and about performance management. I am sure that the Minister will address this point in his remarks — the previous Minister spoke about it as well — but the intention from a funding point of view is not to give one-off grants for a year or two but to embrace a fundamental shift in the balance between the local and regional rates.

That means that, at the end of the day, the same functions are being provided and the same amount of money is required for them, but the balance between them is shifted. The idea that this will create a shift in the balance that will add to the burden on the ratepayer is erroneous. To be fair, had the Member listened to what Minister Attwood said on a number of occasions — it is what I suspect Minister Durkan will say — he would know that this will not impose an additional burden because it is, effectively, the equivalent of an internal shift.

Mr B McCrea: I hear the words, but political expediency will sometimes come to the fore in the years ahead, and we know that no Assembly can bind the following one. I suspect that there will be a movement of responsibility without the commensurate level of funding.

On that issue, I would also point to the rates league table. Much was made of the fact that Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council did not increase its rates. It is interesting to note that Lisburn, Fermanagh, Dungannon and South Tyrone and Castlereagh councils all have a domestic rate of about 25p in the pound, whereas Derry City Council has a rate of 41p. So when we talk about where we can get some equality in the amount of money that is being spent in those areas, what recourse do we have for the ratepayers to make sure that the money is spent appropriately?

I have an issue with the way that this is going. It requires a lot more interrogation and thought. I am still not convinced that councils will be enabled to deal with difficult issues such as flags and emblems, the protection of minorities and respect. All those important community planning issues are not going to be dealt with in this Bill. It is an abdication of responsibility by this Assembly, which, unable to get its own house in order, is seeking to devolve its own dysfunctionality to other places.

On that basis, we should think again. I am not with those who say that we have to get through this because we have been talking about it for so long now that it will be embarrassing if we do not do something. This Bill is wrong in principle and it will not improve things for the people of Northern Ireland. It will not tackle the proper issues. It is not the right way forward.

I say to all those in this Assembly who have raised their concerns that they will not be able to fix this in Committee. There is simply too much to do. We should tackle something a little less ambitious.

People have spoken to me about getting proper representation. There is a challenge to make sure that our electorate know who it is that they are talking to. Is it councillors, or is it Assembly Members, Members of Parliament or Members of the European Parliament? There may well be a situation where there is not clarity, and in my opinion that does not make for good governance.

Mr Weir: I support the Bill. The new Minister is, to some degree, facing a baptism of fire. He has a fairly lengthy Bill in front of him. Those of us who have served on the Committee for the Environment know that it is typical that legislation from the Department of the Environment is quite often, by necessity, weighty in nature and has to cover a wide range of issues.

I should declare a number of interests at the start. I am a member of North Down Borough Council — there is tutting from at least one Member on the opposite Benches — and a member of the transition committee and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. I was previously a member of the policy development panel, which has given me a degree of insight into this Bill.

I pay tribute to all those who were involved in the strategic leadership board and policy development panel. Although there will be issues that I and others will query and that we will need to examine at Consideration Stage, I think that many issues have been gone into and teased out in great detail. So, this has not simply been thrown together by the Department or anyone else.

4.30 pm

At the broadest level of the RPA debate, many issues were addressed, particularly by the Members who spoke previously, that are not directly relevant to the Bill. Beyond community planning, the Bill does not deal with the transfer of functions or the exact balance between the Assembly and local government. I have to say that the level of functions that we operate in local government in Northern Ireland tends to be a lot less than in other parts of the world. To shift some of that additional work and responsibility into local government is, I think, a good thing, as it will bring local government closer to the people. However, I do not want to dwell too much on that, because at the end of the day, the Bill is not about the transfer of functions. Largely speaking, the Bill also does not pay a great deal of attention to the financial position, although it touches on it. Again, however, there seems to be a bit of misunderstanding about that.

Another issue was mentioned that is not in the Bill, but, to be fair, it was suggested that it should be put into it. That is the issue of flags. I have read the Bill, and I know that it deals with a wide range of issues, but it does not impact on the flag situation. It may be another matter if something emerges from the Haass talks. However, those areas that fly the flag at present will continue to do so, and nobody is going to be in a position to effectively compel it to be flown in those areas where it is not. I appreciate that a Member may try to scaremonger on this later in the day, but, as with a lot of things, the scaremongering — *[Interruption.]* What? Sorry?

A Member has already briefed that he will try to scaremonger on the issue, and the reality is that, like many previous attempts at scaremongering, it does not add up. To some extent, the Alliance Party has recognised that, although I disagree with its position. Members from that party realise that the Bill does not deal with the flags issue, so they are proposing changes to it. I have to say that I am not particularly convinced about that. I will look at any amendment that is tabled, but I am not particularly convinced that introducing flag issues to the Bill is a particularly wise way forward. With respect to those in the Alliance Party who would propose that, their previous intervention on flags in local government last year did not work out particularly well. Consequently, I think that that is an exercise that is maybe not to be repeated.

I want to deal with a range of the issues that are in the Bill. First, when the officials briefed the Committee — a large amount of work will have to be done — they mentioned that, between the consultation stage and now,

two substantive changes were made to the Bill. I think that both those changes are to be welcomed. The first change, which I think Mr Elliott mentioned, is the shift towards the power of general competence. That is not to be feared. It will give councils a degree of opportunity, and it has been pushed for some time, for example, by the Local Government Association. Indeed, I know that the incoming president of the Local Government Association, Alderman Hatch, who is Mr Elliott's party colleague, has pushed for the power of general competence. That is an opportunity to give a certain level of freedom to councils. It will be circumscribed, so, councils will not be able to do something that is illegal or unlawful, for example — it will cover a range of things. However, it will give a greater degree of power to the councils, and I welcome that.

The code of conduct and the complaints procedure was another issue that was raised. I think that there has been a considerable improvement on that, but at least one Member raised a concern about it. There is widespread acceptance of a mandatory code of conduct. The shift away from investigations being handled internally by councils to their being handled externally by a commissioner of complaints is to be welcomed from a financial and a practical point of view.

Previously, concerns were raised about internal scrutiny investigations, and having a scrutiny officer in a council was fraught with difficulties. It led to one of two scenarios. The first is that that officer would have been in that post and would have dealt purely with the scrutiny of complaints. We would hope that there would be a very limited number of complaints with local government and that that person would be used fairly rarely. However, they would have a full-time job, costing a large amount of money and would be largely twiddling his or her thumbs and maybe almost looking for complaints. I think that there would be a danger in that.

The more likely scenario raised at an earlier stage with regard to the investigation side and the code of conduct would be that that officer would take that on as part of their portfolio duties. That would place that council officer in a fairly invidious position, because they would be dealing with complaints against councillors one day and then working with them on human resource issues, or whatever other portfolio, on other days. That would lead to a massive conflict of interest. The process of having an independent complaints procedure taken at arm's length is a change to be welcomed.

One area is slightly lacking and needs to be dealt with in Committee. At present, if a sanction is made against a councillor under the legislation, the only right of appeal appears to be by way of judicial review, which seems to be on fairly narrow grounds. For example, if someone is being disqualified from council or is being suspended or fined, we need to build into the process a way of challenging that through a right of appeal.

With regard to governance issues, which play a fairly significant part in the Bill, there have been various allegations against various councils. Some parties and some individuals who have been throwing this about seem to be polishing their halos. There have been various problems with different parties in different councils throughout the years.

With regard to the issue of handing out positions, it is right that mechanisms are put in place. I share the view that there is a range of options. I tried to explain this less from a political point of view and more from a mathematical point of view. For example, a formula involving single transferable vote does not really work if you have a large number of positions. I come from a council where, for many years, we have tried to work it out by formal or informal arrangements and not according to a formula, and that has worked fairly well. Therefore, from that point of view, I would not be doctrinaire and say that there has to be a one size fits all. However, having examined those issues in previous policy panels, there needs to be a default position. It seems to be accepted by most parties that the default position is likely to be d'Hondt and what is controlled within that.

From a technical point of view, I welcome the fact that the Department has outlined the precise procedures for d'Hondt in the schedules. One of the complications that I have seen in local government — sometimes through innocent explanation and sometimes because it has particularly suited one party or another — is that a particular format of d'Hondt has been used over a small number of positions that would suit particular parties. When d'Hondt is being run for positions once over the lifetime of the council, it would, to some extent, start to deal with some of the issues of representation for smaller parties. If you are appointing a wide number of positions, possibly up to 50 or 100, it tends to level out. Where d'Hondt is being used, it is being used consistently and, if it is used by each of the councils in a similar way, that is an advantage.

Mr Elliott referred to the arrangement of functions and, from a governance point of view, whether we would move to a Cabinet-style situation that is permitted within the legislation or use what is akin to what is there at present, which is to have committees. I suspect that, initially, it would be highly unlikely that any of the councils would move directly towards a Cabinet-style system. However, with the experience of functions and the scale of the area to be covered, the current model of committees may not suit either. It is wrong to see this entirely as an either/or situation; it is a spectrum.

We have seen that in a number of councils. In Belfast, a leaders' group sets a degree of strategic direction. I think that is also done on Armagh City and District Council, where representatives from each party form an overarching strategy committee. Those are all means to try to square the circle between a pure committee system and a Cabinet-style system, so we are likely to settle somewhere on that spectrum.

We need to tackle a couple of important issues in the legislation on qualified majority voting, the aim of which is to provide protection to minorities. It is important that the correct balance is struck. Consequently, we will have to examine what may impact adversely on a particular community. It is a matter of protecting minorities while not having a mechanism that is so easy to trigger that is simply creates gridlock in councils. It is about getting that balance right. Some of those issues may have to be dealt with in subordinate legislation, but they need to be looked at. The key to qualified majority voting is the determination of the legitimacy of a call-in, which is an issue that Lord Morrow raised. Which individual or grouping will give a thumbs up

or thumbs down to the legitimacy of a call-in is a difficult circle to square. I am not convinced that chief executives simply referring an issue to a barrister or solicitor of their choice is the best way forward. We will need to examine the best way forward in Committee.

Like others, I welcome the idea of community planning. There is quite often a tendency with RPA to look at the problems. Community planning has the potential to give communities and councils a much greater opportunity to have a debate about shaping their area. As Ian McCrea indicated, elements of that have been done in the past. However, the legislation puts it on a clearer statutory footing. As Ian and others indicated, however, when we are examining community planning, we need to ensure that its methodology is sufficiently robust. We must not start with the chief executive on day one, and work our way down the staff so that, by the sixth meeting, the office junior is representing the council with Roads Service, the local health trust or the Housing Executive. It is important that everybody buys into the benefits of community planning. We need to make sure that that is done correctly.

The partnership panel is to be strongly welcomed. The wording of the legislation may need to be looked at slightly. Although we have assurances from officials, it would be useful if the Minister gave us an assurance on that. The current wording refers to councillors being nominated or more or less appointed by the Department. If that is simply a technical device, with the Minister signing off on names that come from local government, nobody will have a problem. However, if the Minister, as in a medieval royal court, were picking and choosing which of his subjects are best placed to do the job — I do not know how many of his colleagues would make it onto that list, but that is another matter — that would be fundamentally wrong. I suspect that that is not the case, and I assume that it is the former rather than the latter. It would be useful if the Minister dealt with that in his remarks at the end of the debate.

It will be useful to have a reasonably uniform system for performance management. Although I have not been able to get to the bottom of some of the detail, I think that local government has raised concerns about whether that side of things has been got entirely right. Although I appreciate the desire to ensure that transferred functions in particular are carried out correctly, an overly onerous intervention regime from Departments would, I think, backfire. That should happen only in extreme circumstances.

4.45 pm

One other aspect that was touched on — I may seek clarification as to whether it was, but I know that it was raised in Committee — is that we are now in a situation in which pretty much every council in Northern Ireland has an audit committee. I think that the bulk of those committees have at least one representative who is independently appointed. One thing that we may need to look at in the detail of the legislation is trying to ensure that that independent element is made compulsory for all audit committees. Again, that is something to be looked at by the Committee.

In conclusion, the Bill is another major piece of the jigsaw of moving forward with RPA. It has actually been a particularly long process. If the Bill does not come out of the Committee by February, it will not be through any want of the Committee that that target is not reached. We

will need to deal with a wide range of issues. I have to say that I suspect that, even with the passing of the Second Stage today, we will hear some in local government tell us very earnestly that, despite whatever assurances the Assembly, the previous Minister or the current Minister has given, they have heard that this is not going to happen. That seems to be the one almost inevitability in local government. I think that, with the passage of the legislation, a very clear signal will be sent out that RPA is on track. It is happening. It will be there to benefit all citizens. Ultimately, that is what this should be about.

With others on the Committee for the Environment, I look forward to going through the detail of the legislation to ensure that it is correct. We have a big job of work to do on a very large piece of legislation. In the past, the Committee has worked hard on it. We can get this right and ensure that we move forward in a way that benefits all Northern Ireland's citizens. Therefore, I support the Bill.

Mr Dickson: As I have already mentioned to the House, my local government experience goes back over 30 years. I joined Carrickfergus Borough Council in 1977, some four years after the last reorganisation. As others have mentioned, reorganisation of local government has served Northern Ireland well in a number of ways. In other ways, it has been part of Northern Ireland's problem. However, we have to pay tribute to those councillors and others for, really, the only democratic light that was switched on anywhere across the Province during some very dark days was in our 26 town halls and civic buildings. That is not to suggest that many rows and very difficult situations did not also happen inside those buildings during that period. They did, however, provide stability in the community and society when there was a great deal of instability.

Sharing responsibility in those councils was highly problematic. Some councils were prepared to embrace some forms of sharing responsibility. However, the vast majority decided that if they were in the majority, that was the end of the story. I was fortunate enough to be mayor of Carrickfergus in the early 1990s, not because my colleagues from other political parties were prepared to share responsibility with me and my party but because they were, in effect, squabbling among themselves and had broken into various factions, which resulted in various little deals being done rather than there being any cohesive and responsible policy that allowed for recognition of people being able to deliver for the whole community.

The key part of my contribution to the debate concerns the code of conduct for members. I could not agree more that we need that code of conduct, because, sadly, over the years we have seen various members of councils get up to things and do things that were not appropriate but that could not be dealt with by the local authority or that members or political parties were not prepared to deal with themselves. We need a very clear mandatory code of conduct for members. However, as others have said, if somebody has transgressed and is called before the conduct committee of a local authority, that person needs to have the right of appeal.

That is as important as the protection for the public of knowing that there is a code of conduct and a standard against which members will be called to account.

The other side of that coin is protection for the employees of local authorities. In addition to the normal employee-employer relationship, which is, of course, full of rules and regulations, employees in local government can be and sometimes are exposed to pressure from political groups or, indeed, individual members who seem to think that they own a fiefdom rather than have a democratic responsibility in a local authority. Therefore, we need to give consideration to protecting employees from the overbearing and ill-advised activities of council members and to ensure that council employees themselves do not effectively go native and become de facto supporters of a particular grouping or, indeed, a campaign for something to be built or delivered in a particular community. So, we need to ensure that the legislation deals with that area of responsibility as well.

I note that the Bill requires annual improvement reports, but I am disappointed that they are primarily financial improvement reports. Although such reports are absolutely necessary, these improvement reports need to go substantially beyond the financial activities and financial probity of a local authority. In improving local government, we need to ensure that we also improve the efficiency, delivery and business of the new local authorities for ratepayers and citizens. I would, therefore, like to see the whole clause on annual improvement reports changed so that they are delivered by a much wider spectrum of inspection than just financial inspections by the local government auditor. Simply put, we need to have what are, in effect, school-type reports, indicating how a council is performing against a set of parameters, which are then matched against other local authorities.

After some 15 years of debating this legislation to get to where we are, we have to wake up and realise that the existing 26 councils are tired and are no longer fit for purpose. They may have done a good job, but we now need to deliver a modern, efficient and appropriate local government system for the citizens of Northern Ireland that will last for the next 40 years. It needs to be a system that, I have to say, is not bogged down by the failures of this establishment, as others have said. We have to rise above that. We have to recognise the issues that are problems for us and put in place mechanisms that allow local government to deliver in a modern and effective way for all our citizens. If that means that we have to deal with the contentious issues of flags, shared responsibility and weighted majorities, we need to put down those rules in the regulations and in the Bill to ensure that, when the new ship of local government sets sail, it does so with a fair wind to deliver for everyone.

Mr A Maginness: I am pleased to speak in favour of the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill, which is truly a milestone in the history of local government. This is the first serious reform of local government in about 40 years. The Bill, if enacted in its present form, will make some interesting improvements to local government, in particular the recognition of the need to share responsibility in councils. That is a very important aspect of local government. In order to attract the confidence and support of local communities, responsibility needs to be shared. Although that has been done on an arbitrary, ad hoc basis right across Northern Ireland, it is right and proper that it should have some sort of legislative form, and this represents a step towards achieving that. All of us in the Chamber long for a shared future, and I believe that we

can have a shared future at local government level through this Local Government Bill.

I was a councillor, like many others who have spoken during the debate, for 24 years. I am only a junior in comparison with Mr Dickson or the Lord Morrow. If you count up the years that Members of the House have served in local government, it would come to perhaps a century or two or even a millennium. When I served on Belfast City Council, we had a committee system that worked reasonably well, but there have been other experiences in local government, particularly across the water, of the development of Cabinet-style executives. The Bill permits that type of governance arrangement, and it is right and proper that councils should be given an opportunity to at least try to develop that form of governance. It has to be done, of course, in accordance with fairness and on the basis of power sharing, but it would be of assistance in streamlining decision making in local government, which can, at times, become very slow and cumbersome. This option should be welcomed, and I believe that it could change the culture of local government. Alongside the executive in local government, you would have councillors whose function would be to scrutinise the decision-making of the executive. I am not absolutely certain whether there is sufficient power among those who scrutinise the decisions of the executive — that is, the councillors who are not involved in the executive — to have what they might regard as bad decision-making reversed. We have to look at that in the legislation, and it might be useful if the Minister were to express a view on that. Nonetheless, if the scrutiny function is developed by councillors, it will mean having a different role from other councillors who are engaged in executive decision making, and that will create a political tension in the council — a healthy one in my view — that will create a healthier political environment.

I also welcome the concept of community planning. That is important for councils, and the council would have a wide brief on community planning. I am not sure how it would work out in practice, because councils are engaged in quite a number of functions now that are much wider than first envisaged by our traditional councils. The widening of their scope and function is, in my view, a good thing. The discipline that will be imposed on councils for continuous improvement in performance will also be a good thing. It will be an incentive for better performance management of councils, and, whilst councils try to improve their performance, that duty, which will be imposed on councils, will be very important.

I notice that the Bill refers to the control of councils, but I wonder what that means in practice. I would be a bit wary of Departments behaving towards councils in a Big Brother fashion. Councils should be given a degree of flexibility, unencumbered by central government interference. One of the beauties of councils is that they can take local decisions to deal with local problems and circumstances which they are better acquainted with than central government is. I would not like to see councils constrained or restrained in that way by Departments.

5.00 pm

The partnership panel is an interesting concept. I am not absolutely certain what it will mean in practice, but if there is a partnership idea — I put the emphasis on partnership

rather than having a top-down position by central government to councils — I hope that that can develop. I am not certain what it will actually mean in practice. Perhaps the Minister can outline what he believes that would mean.

I also welcome the fact that the conduct of councillors will be put on a stronger statutory footing and that there will be a commissioner looking at the conduct of councillors. That is helpful and will create a better political and administrative discipline within which councillors will operate. That will help to raise standards of conduct and behaviour in councils, but it is important that there be that authority.

On that note, I conclude. I wish the Bill well. There will be a lot of work to be done in Committee, but I believe that there is general goodwill towards the Bill from all parties and that we can make good legislation that adds to the general welfare of all our citizens.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tugaim moladh don Aire as ucht an Bille a thabhairt os ár gcomhair inniu. Full marks to the Minister for bringing the Bill before us.

Local government has given us some of the worst and some of the best: some of the worst in our past that led us through discrimination in housing, jobs, planning and all; and some of the best in circumstances where our councils have worked together on the basis of sharing power, respect, trust and getting to know one another. It is that grass-roots working that I trust will be embryonic in the Bill — building trust and reconciliation and working our way towards what should be our shared future of local communities and councillors engaging one another and building trust in each other step by step.

I welcome the Local Government Bill and the potential to debate this important reform and opportunities for our local democratic system of government. It has taken a long time to reach this stage, but it is important that we get it right. We face a tight schedule if the Bill is to complete its passage through the Assembly in time for the elections to the new councils, which are hopefully expected on 22 May next year. I hope and trust that there will be no further unnecessary delay.

The SDLP has consistently argued that the principle of equality must be the cornerstone of any reform of local government and that equality of treatment must be enshrined in legislation. I trust and hope that the measures in the Bill will achieve that aim.

Some that are noteworthy have already come to our attention in their nominations to the various shadow and transition committees. Lisburn and Castlereagh councils have come to our attention as potentially not doing things in the way that they should do: to be inclusive, to be respectful and to have members included on the basis of the mandate that they have sought and on the basis of equality, fairness and respect for their respective mandate.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Would he include in that list one in his patch: Magherafelt council?

Mr McGlone: Thank you very much, Tom, you have stolen my thunder. The next one that I was coming to mention was Magherafelt District Council, in which Sinn Féin, with 48.4% of the previous mandate, took 80% of the representation on the statutory committee for that area. Out of five, it took four. Those are the sorts of things that

we hoped had been left in the past. They do not bid us well for the future.

Of course, in those examples, I have disregarded what is being done with good faith in many other district council areas. They did not need legislation to do it. They knew that it was the right thing to do: to be inclusive and embrace the membership of —

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member giving way. He makes the point about Lisburn, and I think that he unfairly represents something that is not the case. In Dunmurry Cross, there are six nationalist councillors and one unionist. Does he not believe that that minority community, which was told that it needs to be part of the shared future, should have a representative on the statutory transition committee? Sinn Féin has chosen to boycott its opportunity to take up the position. We have now put forward, in fulfilling our duty, the SDLP member of the council, John Drake. *[Interruption.]* At least he was up until —

Mr McGlone: The good Member has got his facts wrong. It is maybe catching around this place, from the top down in his party. I will clarify that Mr Drake is obviously an independent member. In making the case earlier, I was not making the case for anyone else. Indeed, I think that Alliance has been dropped off the end at that council. I hope that that clarifies it for the Member. I do not know whether he is a member of the council. I am sure that somebody there can put him right, so that he can get his facts right, just like his leader.

I will get back to the Bill. We trust that the measures included in the Bill will achieve that aim. As a party, we felt that it was the wrong number of councils. That is because there was a concern that the smaller the number of councils, the less the connection with local communities and the grass roots. With a greater number of councils, there would be more connection with those grass-roots communities. However, the new councils will have a greater role and powers that are more wide-ranging than before, including a new lead role in community planning. It is vital that those powers are exercised with great responsibility. One of the most significant measures in that regard is the enshrinement in law for the first time of the sharing of council positions across political parties. The introduction of a mandatory code of conduct for all councillors and increased transparency of council proceedings will help to generate a culture of greater accountability to the public. The Bill also includes important measures designed to protect the interests of minority groups in the new council areas.

In the past, we have seen examples where political interference has prevailed rather than the primacy of equality and good practice. That has led to bad decisions and downright discrimination in housing, employment and planning. The qualified majority clause and the call-in procedure for contentious decisions should, I hope, enable local representatives to prevent the kind of abuses of power that have, unfortunately, characterised our past; indeed, some of our recent past.

The subordinate legislation that is to follow, further defining the new measures, will be carefully examined to ensure that there is no dilution of the commitment to equality intended in the Bill. My party is most definitely committed to ensuring that these equality measures remain at the

heart of the new legislation that reforms our local government, so that civil rights and civil liberties are at the heart of the decision-making process at local government level.

It is essential that the principle of equality is the cornerstone of reform of local government and that equality of treatment is kept enshrined in the Bill as it passes through this Assembly. That is for all our people, be they unionist or nationalist, or from different backgrounds or other minority communities, or indeed, other individuals. Only then will we have truly the best from local government for all our people. That is the motivation behind the Bill, I trust, and that is the new society, we hope, it will help to bring us to — a shared and respectful future, respecting and catering for all difference. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr McCallister: Reflecting on the debate so far, one might ask how we have got to this point. How have we achieved this? How have we ended up with an 11-council model? Are we trying to make this fit because it has always seemed to have some agreement on it? Different Members have commented on it.

I would urge tremendous caution on the Bill and the changes to local government, simply because we will be stuck with this for a very long time, given that the last reorganisation of local government was in 1973. It will have lasted more than 40 years by the time this Bill, if it is successful, goes through.

It is also strange that one of the arguments for doing this, which Lord Morrow progressed, was that, in the 1973 reorganisation, it was always envisaged that there would be an Assembly here as well as a tier of local government. Bizarrely, now that we have an Assembly, one of the first things it decided was to reorganise local government, even though we went through the past number of years without an Assembly, and local government, as many Members said, was the one part of our democratic system that had some form of function. All this leads me to the obvious conclusion that the case has simply not been made as to why we would reorganise local government or, indeed, whether this is the right model for that reorganisation.

Look at the various Parts of the Bill, such as community identity and how you would build that. I take Stewart Dickson's point that some people felt that way in 1973 or in 1977 and that there was no identity. Take places such as Ballynahinch, where the population probably naturally looks more towards Lisburn, but its parliamentary constituency is Strangford, and its new council will be Newry City, Mourne and Down District. Where are the linkages there? Where are the common community identities in that model?

It seems that we have decided, pretty much, on a carve-up deal. We could not get agreement on what it was going to be; the original number of councils was seven, and then we moved to 11 as a sort of compromise. So, now, we have got to the point where this Bill is trying to make all that fit into the model that we have already decided upon. The Bill is effectively trying to put a round pin into a square hole; it is not going to fit, and it is not going to work well.

That is why I, along with my colleague Mr McCrea, argue that you cannot devolve the dysfunctionality of this Assembly to local government and expect it to work and expect that, by some miracle, it will function and actually achieve a solution to some of the cases and deal with the

difficult issues that it will have to deal with. We cannot even agree on what the flag-flying policy at times should be here. How are we going to get councils to agree on and deal with those issues?

5.15 pm

The financial case, I have to say — the Minister, I am sure, will want to tackle this — the financial case, of all things, certainly does not stack up. Councils that have lower rate burdens and lower debt burdens are merging with councils with much higher debt burdens. I just do not see how that — how this Bill — is going to be in the interests of ratepayers in those areas. You come back to looking right across the board: where is the joined-up government? The model in the Bill, which we are debating, does not fit in with anything that we already have out there. It does not fit with our parliamentary and Assembly constituencies. It ploughs through many of the district councils that we already have. It does not fit with any health trusts, education boards — anything that we have out there. So there is no sense of any coterminosity with anything on any of these issues.

Then we come to the point of why we think that some of our voter numbers are going down. Why do we think people are disconnected from the political system when they see no relevance in this Bill to what they will pay in their rates and what services they might get? That is why I just do not think that this Bill is worth any merit. We have designed a system with no strategic vision of what we are going to do, and we have just said, “That is the system.” Now, effectively, to the Minister we are saying, “Write a Bill to make it fit”. I do not think that is an acceptable way of doing business.

That is before we even look at planning. Does anyone here truly believe that councils are going to be one of the best places to deal with planning? We already have a very difficult planning system. Do people think that devolving that system to councils will improve it, speed it up or bring any type of strategic vision? Of course, the Minister might get a lucky break on that, and OFMDFM might just take the planning system off him altogether and not devolve it to councils. I do not think that councils are fit or have the capacity, quite frankly, to deal with planning issues.

Most of our council functions at the minute are dealing with waste. I can certainly tell you, Deputy Speaker, as a rural dweller, that I do not particularly feel a great linkage between what I pay in rates and what I get in the delivery of council services. I get my bin emptied, and that is about the height of it. I think that when we merge councils together and look at what is going to happen on the finance in this Bill, we begin to question how that is going to make for even more disillusionment for ratepayers and voters, who will wonder why there are no linkages there.

Look at all this dysfunctionality that we are proposing to devolve to councils. We are also wanting to devolve, effectively, a petition of concern mechanism to councils. I have to say that that has really served us well in here. Look at the number of times that the DUP has used a petition of concern — on some strange pieces of legislation, on clauses and on different things that it just objects to, it says, “We will use a petition of concern.” That is something that we are proposing to put out to councils. I see Mr Campbell pointing. He has to know that no other party can actually sign a petition of concern on its own, so at least you have a safeguard there of needing a second party.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I was pointing because Mr McCallister was referring to the fact that the DUP has used the petition of concern mechanism, which is true. I was pointing to indicate that many people have used a petition of concern, but he chose only to mention the DUP.

Mr McCallister: I think it is obvious why I chose only to mention the DUP. The DUP is the only party that can sign a petition of concern on its own. Sinn Féin needs —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Can I draw the Member back to the Bill, please?

Mr McCallister: Yes. Thank you, Deputy Speaker. That is the point in the Bill. Why would you devolve that type of mechanism to councils, considering the chaos that, quite frankly, it sometimes causes in this Assembly? I am not sure that the arguments are there for it. So, at every turn, we look at that dysfunctionality; we look at the carve-up of orange and green politics that infects this place — the sectarianism that infects this place — and we put that out to local government. That is exactly why we have come up with an 11-council model and drafted the Bill to say that that is what will happen. There is no light yet on whether we are devolving the financial wherewithal to do some of this or whether we are simply devolving the powers without the financial responsibility. All of that paints a very grim picture of how good the model is for moving forward the reorganisation of local government.

I come back to the point that the case has not been made. Not one Member today has made a case beyond saying that it is about time that local government was reorganised. The most convincing case probably came from Stewart Dickson who said that our councils are old and tired: that is about all we have. We are doing something that might set up a council structure for the next 40 years, and that is the only basis for it. What are the great arguments from the DUP or Sinn Féin for doing this? We are devolving areas of responsibility, and there are questions over whether our councils would be capable and whether there are linkages between voters and ratepayers and how they link into that. On every single issue, we are asking the Assembly to devolve our dysfunctionality to councils, and we somehow think that it will all work and end happily.

We look at the state of the Chamber and we think, “Why do we not replicate this across Northern Ireland and have the relationships that we have here across local government?” There will be the same parties across local government.

Mr Givan: Some parties will not —

Mr McCallister: I hear him shout. Hopefully, there will be a sense of fresh politics in some councils to add a touch of sanity to the proceedings.

That is why we will be opposing the Bill. It has not been well thought through. No one has made the case. In doing this, we are very much trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It is wrong, it is bad legislation, and the model has not been proven. The projected savings are very much in doubt, and the ability of councils to deliver some of these things, particularly planning, is also in doubt. We are devolving our failings to the councils, and that is not a good way forward. That is why I will be opposing the Bill.

Mr Allister: No doubt, there are some who would like the general public to believe that what we are engaged in today is a coherent, structured process of reforming

local government in a manner that is cogent and logical; that we have taken to redrafting boundaries on a sensible and rational basis and not, which, of course, is the reality, on the basis of a carve-up settlement between the DUP/ Sinn Féin axis, so that we have produced such ludicrous twinings as Ballybeen with Moira or Ballynahinch with Newry and we, in the process, have sold out and abandoned the unionist position in Belfast.

This is from a starting point where, of course, there were some who said that the logical outcome was 15 councils. If 15 was right then, it is right today. The reason we do not have 15 is because of that squalid deal between the DUP and Sinn Féin to produce 11 councils, and, in the process, do the things that I have said.

Along the way, we did have some sham fights. We had the Health Minister, when he was Environment Minister, go through the great process of a sham fight about Dunmurry. What about Dunmurry now?

Mr Campbell: Shadow boxing.

Mr Allister: Yes. Shadow boxing, sham fight — whatever you like, Mr Campbell — no doubt all those designations would fit. Of course, in traditional DUP fashion, it all faded away — another rollover.

Mr Deputy Speaker: May I draw the Member back to the Bill? He will be aware that some of the issues that he is speaking about are not dealt with in the Bill.

Mr Allister: I will come back to the content of the Bill. I thought, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you were rising to protect me, shrinking violet that I am, from Mr Campbell's sedentary interruptions. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: I will try to deal with those in my own way.

Here comes Mr Poots, the man of whom I spoke, the Dunmurry sham fighter.

It has been suggested that this is a cogent, coherent approach to the reform of local government, which we will consummate with the elections on 22 May. The reality, however, is that we are discussing a Bill about how local government should function in the reformed system, without knowing whether it has any chance of being in law by 22 May. I suspect that it probably will not be. So we will elect new shadow councils on 22 May, with none of the Bill's content likely to be in law by that date. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that, considering the snail pace of the House, come April 2015, when the new councils are supposed to take over, this legislation will not even be in place. What happens then? Will the Minister have to come in with an extension order for the 26 councils?

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I do not think that it will worry the DUP too much, considering that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) has been in shadow form for years.

Mr Allister: I think that somebody should put ESA out of its misery, and that would solve that problem.

My point is this: we are involved in a process that lacks the structure and cogency to assure that it can deliver workable, functioning local government. We are so late in the process that, come those elections, the legislation might still be in draft form rather than being an Act of the Assembly.

Perhaps it suits some to be able to say, "When we get into the new councils, wait till you see what we will do. We will deal with the flags issue and all sorts of issues" — happy in the knowledge that they can say that because there is nothing binding in the legislation. They do not then have to face up to what they have sold out to in the legislation. They can beat their chests in traditional fashion, knowing that they can put off the evil day of facing up to the realities that will be effected should the legislation come into play.

I say to the Minister: what happens on 22 May if the Bill is not in place? What is being said to the people of Northern Ireland about the future shape of their local government? What happens to the councils if it is not even in place in 2015?

5.30 pm

I find the Bill excessively prescriptive. Many of the arrangements are stifling and prescriptive in the restraints that they place on councils, no more so than the governmental arrangements. What we have in the Bill is an institutionalising of d'Hondt. There are some in the House who, for years, have told us how hostile they are to d'Hondt and how their political ambition is to rid the House of it. I know that their actions defy their words, but those are their words. Yet here we have them supporting the very institutionalising of d'Hondt in local government. It has worked really well here, has it not? Now, we will institutionalise it in local government and expect that doing so will provide working local government. Did we learn nothing from the experiences of recent times?

When I say that the legislation is highly prescriptive, I am thinking of the fact that one of the governmental arrangements is an executive of the council. You might have a 40-man council, you might have a 60-man council, but you will have an executive of between four and 10 running it. What the other 30-odd or 50-odd are meant to do is not very clear. Maybe we could give them a little scrutiny role — that should keep them happy. That should make them sound and seem important. However, when it comes to running the council, let us give it to the big carve-up, the four to 10 members. That proposition is not about sharing power; it is about concentrating power in the hands of the few.

Indeed, there are some remarkable things in the Bill. In clause 26, there is a presumption that all power in those circumstances will be vested not in the council that is elected but in the executive that is selected. Likewise —

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he not recognise that the executive is one of a range of governance options? The executive is exactly the system that operates in the vast bulk of councils in England, Scotland and Wales. Portraying it as sinister when it is simply one option on the table and replicates what exists elsewhere seems slightly ludicrous.

Mr Allister: The Member says that it is one option; it is the first option stated in the Bill. It is an option and is, I suppose, one of two main options. However, the clause is predicated upon acceptance of that option. Clause 27(3), for example, states:

"(3) Accordingly, any function which is the responsibility of an executive of a council under executive arrangements -

(a) may not be discharged by the council”.

So the corporate action, the right and responsibility of the council itself, is removed and vested exclusively in the dictating cabal that is the executive, and there is no accountability of any meaningful nature back from that. So I will say this again: you elect 40 people, maybe six get to exercise real power. The rest are observers of and passengers in the process. Robbing councils of their corporate power does not improve the democratisation of local government.

It is interesting that an individual councillor who seeks information under the Bill can be denied it. Clause 37 (3) states:

“(3) The overview and scrutiny committee or the council, in providing a copy of the document to a councillor, may exclude any confidential information or relevant exempt information.”

The council can keep information from that councillor.

Clause 37(4)(a) states:

“Where information is excluded ... the overview and scrutiny committee or the council, in publishing, or providing a copy of, the document may replace so much of the document as discloses the information with a summary which does not disclose that information”.

Clause 37(6) has this classic line:

“The overview and scrutiny committee is nevertheless to be taken for the purposes of section 36(3)(c) or (d) to have published or provided a copy of the report or recommendations.”

So you can conceal, but there is a statutory presumption that whatever you provide is the full story. Where in this proposal is the openness and transparency that some boast about?

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Let me come to something that Mr Weir sought to preview for me. It is interesting that the DUP Chief Whip has time to follow my tweets. I do not know whether I should be flattered or otherwise, but there you are. I come to the issue of weighted majorities — qualified majorities — in the Bill and where that sits and how it plays with the important issue of symbols and flags for councils. We all know from recent experience just how pertinent and far-reaching the impact of councils flying or not flying a flag can be. What does the Bill state about that? It states some very interesting things. It states that some decisions according to standing orders will be taken by qualified majority. A council might well decide of its own volition what will and what will not be decided by a qualified majority, which is 80%. The key statutory provision is in clause 42(2)(c), which gives the power to the Minister to make regulations that:

“require that a vote with respect to a matter falling to be decided by the council ... is to be taken in a particular manner.”

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: When I have finished the point.

The Minister reserves for himself the right by regulation to override a council, to dictate and determine that a vote on a particular matter is to be taken in a particular manner, which incorporates a qualified majority. The first question that arises is this: is the Minister minded to make a regulation pertaining to flag-flying in councils? The Alliance Party has suggested, for example, designated days across the Province in all councils. Others suggested sitting days, and others more than that. The first question is this: is the Minister minded to make such a regulation? I suspect that he is not. If he is not, that matter then falls to the individual councils. The starting point for any new council is a clean sheet of paper. New councils do not inherit the flag policy of their previous constituent parts.

They start with a clean sheet of paper. Say the Minister decided, in those circumstances — foolishly, I would say — that he was going to make a regulation that required a vote on such a matter to be by a qualified majority, then a proposition that, for example, the Union flag shall fly from Ballymena Town Hall, Carrickfergus Town Hall or Larne Town Hall would, in those circumstances, need 80% of the elected councillors to support it.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: In a moment. The exercise starts with a blank piece of paper.

Mr Weir: The Member has obviously read clauses 41, 42 and 43 assiduously, but it is a pity that he did not read further in the legislation. The Member refers to regulations, specifically in clauses 42 and 44, which deal with standing orders, and clause 125 states:

“(3) Regulations and orders to which this subsection applies must not be made unless a draft of the regulations or order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.”

The Minister does not have a free hand. Should he want to take action to compel a council to make the flying of a flag subject to a qualified majority vote, he would have to bring that to the House as a regulation that would then require the approval of the House. We have read the clause, and it is a pity that the Member has not read it quite so well. I am sorry to burst his bubble.

Mr Allister: I assure you that I did read it. Is it meant to give me comfort that the flying of the Union flag relies on the DUP having the bottle and the courage to see off a regulation? On the basis of past performance, I take no confidence from that whatsoever. What I see there is a classic playing out of a trade-off, whereby one regulation is blocked, another is blocked, and eventually there is a mishmash of a compromise. If Mr Weir is saying that I should sleep well tonight because the Union flag is safe in his and his party's hands, I am sorry, but, from past experience, it is not. On past experience of stopping what Sinn Féin wants to do in government, it is a miserable record of failure. Look at education and at how Sinn Féin have rampaged through that. Despite all the supposed vetoes, there has not been a whimper to stop them. *[Interruption.]* Not a single attempt to stop them —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat. I am trying to help the Member and steer him back to the Bill. The Second Stage debate should be on the principles of the Bill. I am trying to be helpful to the Member.

Mr Allister: I come back to my point and the fact that the Minister can bring forward a regulation to force the hand of a council. I ask the Minister — let him answer in his response — whether he is minded to bring forward regulations touching on flags if he is not bringing forward a regulation dictating the policy on the flying of flags across the councils. Is he likely to do what I have suggested? He owes us an answer that is straightforward and honest, as I am sure it would be.

I will pick up on Mr Weir's comment. If the Minister brings forward a regulation that is blocked, what happens then? If you are starting with a blank sheet of paper, as you will be with these councils, and there is a proposition that the Union flag should fly from council premises 365 days a year, does Mr Weir really think that, because of the way in which the Bill is worded, the Minister cannot do anything about that? I hope that he is right, but does he really think that? I suspect that he knows he is not right. The difficulty is that you are not inheriting the policies of the constituent bodies that make up the new councils; you are starting from a fresh position in which, if the hurdles are laid as they can be laid in the Bill by the Minister, the prospects of the flag being able to fly where it should fly are in severe jeopardy. I say to Members who care about those things that they need to think cautiously and carefully about that. We could get ourselves into a situation in which our latter position is worse than our first.

5.45 pm

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He used the euphemism of thinking carefully and cautiously. I ask him to think carefully and cautiously and tell us whether his opposition, as one imagines is what he meant by that, means that he would prefer the current 26-council make-up and all that flows therefrom to their reconstitution under the Bill.

Mr Allister: On matters of acting cautiously and carefully, I wish that Mr Campbell would give that advice to his party leader. Let us be clear: I wanted a 15-council model, as Mr Campbell did.

Mr Campbell: That was not the question.

Mr Speaker: Order. There should not be debate across the Chamber.

Mr Allister: Mr Campbell, once more, rolled over on that. Do I want 11 councils of this amalgam as opposed to 26? Frankly, I think that the 26 is probably marginally preferable to the 11 but not as good as the 15, which we could have had if Mr Campbell, not for the first time —

Mr Campbell: That will do — “marginally preferable”.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: — had not been a rollover unionist.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I want to say a few words as Chair to inform Members about the Committee's interest in the arrangements specific to Part 9, which deals with the conduct of councillors. The Committee is interested in these arrangements because it envisages that complaints about breaches of the code of conduct for councillors will be policed by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. Members may recall that, on 16 September, we debated and approved in the

Chamber the Committee's proposals for a Bill to reform the office of Commissioner for Complaints and merge it with that of the Assembly Ombudsman, thus creating a new public services ombudsman's office.

The then Minister of the Environment, in his contribution to the OFMDFM response to the Committee's proposals, referred to the consultation on a new ethical standards framework for the new councils. That consultation envisaged a central role for the Commissioner for Complaints, who would investigate and adjudicate on complaints. The Minister concluded by indicating that he would advise the Committee of the final policy proposals that he intended to introduce once they were agreed by Executive colleagues.

The Committee was briefed on the proposals by the current Commissioner for Complaints, Dr Tom Frawley, on 22 May this year. He said that the envisaged arrangements would resemble those operating in Wales and cost considerably less than other options under consideration. I refer Members to his testimony on that day. He said that, if we were to adopt or transcribe what happened in Wales, he envisaged six-figure savings.

Dr Frawley also emphasised the potential for extended hearings to deal with complaints, with all parties legally represented, resulting in a correspondingly expensive process. Tom Frawley advised that the Welsh Government had indemnified councillors, which had encouraged the use of lawyers. He went on to highlight the need for a process designed to limit and, indeed, eliminate the potential for the cost of the process to escalate. Dr Frawley felt that the remit was a reasonable fit with the current role of the Commissioner for Complaints but raised a concern that the additional responsibilities be properly funded. He felt that the Department of the Environment should be central in making the necessary resources available and that it should not be left to him or his successors to:

“go and negotiate the funds for it”.

From looking at the arrangements in clause 67, it seems that the commissioner will have to issue bills to the new councils for their apportioned share of the costs of operating the new system. Councillors “must pay” their share to the commissioner, and, if they do not, it is deemed to be a debt recoverable by the commissioner. That is set out in clause 67(4) and (5). I am not sure that that type of billing arrangement is what Dr Frawley had in mind when he told the Committee that those who ask the commissioner to take on these responsibilities:

“should also have a critical role in agreeing and taking on the costs, and in making funds available to fulfil the roles.”

It would be helpful if the Minister could indicate whether Dr Frawley is content with the proposed funding mechanisms and with the other arrangements that are set out in Part 9.

I believe that Committee members will wish to be assured that that new remit will be properly funded and that its delivery for the Department of the Environment will not dilute the commissioner's ability to deal with citizens' complaints about public services. Dr Frawley also emphasised the need for a commitment to review the new arrangements in three to four years and to make any changes that may be deemed necessary. The Committee will keep the proposals under review and will liaise with the

Committee for the Environment as more detail becomes available. As indicated in the Committee's report, we will wish to ensure that the proposals are developed in a manner consistent with the model for establishing and holding the proposed new public services ombudsman to account through an enhanced relationship with the Assembly.

Mr Speaker, thank you for your indulgence. I will now say a few words in my capacity as a Member. As you would expect, I am fully in favour of a properly funded and resourced regime to police complaints concerning breaches of the code of conduct for councillors. Beyond that, I will not rehearse the points that my colleague Mr Elliott made when he highlighted what we think is right and what we think is wrong about the proposals. Suffice it to say that, as we come towards the end of the debate, the Ulster Unionist Party will do what is right for Northern Ireland.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I am grateful to the Chair of the Environment Committee and to Members from all sides of the House for their consideration of the Bill and their largely measured and positive contributions. Their comments, even those that were maybe not so measured and positive, have all been valuable.

I will now respond to the issues that were raised, and I assure Members that I will also read over the Hansard report covering the debate to ensure that I have not missed any issues. If I find that I have, I will write to the Members concerned. There was quite a degree of repetition throughout the debate. That is not in any way a criticism of the debate or the debaters but, indeed, an indication of the common questions and concerns that Members have.

The first contributor was Ms Anna Lo, the Chairperson of the Environment Committee. She spoke in some detail about the impact that the legislation would have on all levels of a council's performance. She spoke of the raft of subordinate legislation and regulations to follow. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the Environment Committee on that. I will depend heavily on guidance, help and cooperation from the Environment Committee as we attempt to progress the legislation. Ms Lo asked several pertinent questions and raised several pertinent points, all of which I will address now. At least, I hope that I will address all of them, and, if I do not, I am sure that she will come back to me.

First, Ms Lo was keen to explore the issue of capacity building for community planning. My Department has established a pilot and community planning working group in partnership with local government to prepare for the introduction of community planning. The working group has developed a foundation programme to help statutory transition committees and transition management teams in each new council cluster to make preparations. The programme sets out advice on key building blocks that councils can put in place in the interim, and that is due to be rolled out at the end of this month. My Department will also provide capacity building to support councils in preparing for the community planning duty that they will receive in April 2015.

Ms Lo then asked if we could specify the bodies that will be required to participate in the support of community planning and guidance for the operation of community

planning. The answer is that those bodies will be specified in regulations. I can confirm that my officials will engage fully with the Committee on the list of bodies that will be included. Officials will also engage with local government and the Committee in drafting the community planning guidance.

There were issues around positions of responsibility. Ms Lo was of the opinion that a locally agreed approach to allocating positions would be the most appropriate way forward. I agree, but, in the absence of any political maturity in councils — sadly, we have seen evidence of a lack of political maturity lately — I consider it more appropriate to define d'Hondt as the default method of allocating positions. The manner in which the process will operate will help to mitigate the drawbacks associated with the formula approach.

There was a question around the level of membership required for call-in and qualified majority voting. I am satisfied that the level of membership of a council required to request that a decision is reconsidered and required for a decision or resolution to be agreed by a qualified majority strikes the appropriate balance between providing protection and enabling council business to proceed. Those levels were agreed by political parties through the strategic leadership board as part of a policy development process.

A point raised by Ms Lo and echoed by Mr Elliott and Lord Morrow was around the role of a solicitor or barrister through or during the call-in process. The individual concerned will have no role in the decision-making process. Their role will be to confirm whether the members requesting the reconsideration of a decision have articulated a case for the disproportionate adverse impact that would arise if the decision was implemented and that the community would be affected. Ultimately, it will be for members of the council to make the decision on the matter under consideration. The details of how the process will operate will be specified, once again, in regulations that will be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Ms Lo asked why we were removing the blanket prohibition on council employees becoming councillors and whether that might create conflicts of interest. The inclusion of the provision is in direct response to a judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in a case taken against the UK Government by a group of senior local authority officers that the prohibition then in force violated their rights under article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. My Department sought legal advice, which indicated that failure to remove the blanket prohibition here could leave my Department open to a similar challenge. The Department will engage with appropriate stakeholders, including the Environment Committee, prior to a public consultation on the proposal about which officers will be subject to the bar.

The date of the election is another question that Ms Lo raised. My Department has been working closely with the Northern Ireland Office in relation to arrangements for the next local government election, including the proposal to bring the date of the election forward to 2014. Moving the date of the election will allow for a transitional period — a shadow period — in advance of the 11 new councils taking up their full range of powers and responsibilities. I understand that an Order in Council is to be laid at Westminster early this month that will include provision

for the election to take place on 22 May 2014, subject to Parliament's approval of the legislation.

There were questions, not just from Ms Lo but from other Members, around the code of conduct and what might be included in that.

It is proposed that the mandatory code of conduct be consistent with the seven Nolan principles with which we are all familiar — at least, we should be — of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. It will include the four additional principles adopted in the code of conduct of the Northern Ireland Assembly: equality; promoting good relations; respect; and good working relationships. The document will provide information on the background to the code; outline its legislative basis; identify and provide clarification on the principles that underpin the code; outline the standards of conduct expected of councillors when acting as a councillor and/or conducting council business; outline the behaviours expected of councillors when dealing with fellow members and officers of councils; and, very importantly, clarify what is expected of councillors with regard to planning matters.

6.00 pm

Ms Lo expressed a concern, which was reiterated by Mr Elliott, Mr Milne and Mr Dickson, that there was no appeals mechanism relating to complaints. As with any decisions made by public bodies, the judicial review process is available to any person who feels that an injustice has occurred. Prior to a decision being made, a person who is alleged to have breached the code will be given the opportunity to refute that allegation, in person, through the commissioner's office. I have asked officials to bring forward for consideration a paper on options for a possible appeals mechanism. If necessary, I will table an amendment on that at the next stage.

Ms Brown was the next contributor to the debate. I congratulate her on her elevation to Deputy Chair of the Environment Committee, and I look forward to working with her. Her contribution focused largely on existing collaboration — or what should be existing collaboration — between councils through the ICE programme. She asked how we could ensure that the ICE programme was inclusive of all councils, and not just an option. The ICE programme is, rightly, owned and delivered by the local government sector itself. That said, I and my predecessor have encouraged all councils to participate fully in driving savings through ICE. To support that, I am enshrining in legislation the requirement to fully and formally address performance improvement in local government.

The ICE programme has delivered savings. A considerable amount of work has been carried out in a number of ICE work streams, including customer-facing services, procurement, ICT, human resources and support services. That work has begun to deliver efficiencies, and I am encouraged by the fact that the chair of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) recently indicated that local government has begun to develop a culture of collaboration. I strongly feel that that culture will need to be developed further to enable improved citizen-centric services while ensuring minimum rate increases. Furthermore, I strongly agree with my predecessor that all councils should be availing themselves of each and every opportunity to become more efficient and prudent

with ratepayers' money. That may mean that councils' senior people, officials and elected members, will have to show leadership to ensure a more cohesive and consistent approach to embracing the principles of the ICE programme.

I understand that the ICE customer-facing services work stream produced a conservative estimate that the available savings over the next 25 years will be £200 million. I would like all ICE work streams to carefully identify what efficiencies they have already put in place and estimate what savings will be delivered in the future. I have asked the ICE leads to develop a matrix to capture that information and to provide me with it as a matter of urgency. I will be happy to share that with the Committee and the House. It is important that we learn from what ICE has achieved and build on that model. Hopefully, that will result in more shared services across local government, not just in the new clusters but across them.

Ms Brown questioned community involvement in the planning and delivery of services and had another question around community planning. The Bill places a clear statutory requirement on the new councils to engage effectively with the local community and its representative bodies.

Mr Boylan — he is awake — said that his party has always been supportive of reform and making local government more accountable. It is fair to say that everyone in the House wants to ensure that local government is as accountable as possible. He said that this is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we will deal with in this Assembly. I am not sure whether I would go that far, but I will say that it is the most important that I have dealt with so far.

He asked whether I could provide details of the subordinate legislation. The Bill contains a number of enabling powers for subordinate legislation, guidance and other statutory documents. Those will include regulations on standing orders for councils, which I will make; provisions for regulating proceedings and business; regulations to designate those employees who will still be prohibited from being councillors; regulations to provide more detail on the new executive arrangements, including the functions that cannot be delegated to an executive; order on overview and scrutiny arrangements; regulations to specify the community planning partners; regulations on performance indicators and performance standards; and the mandatory code of conduct.

There will also be statutory guidance on executive arrangements, positions of responsibility, community planning, performance improvement and the schemes of transfer of assets, liabilities and staff. Mr Boylan emphasised the need to ensure that proportionality applies and the precise method of application of each of the alternative approaches to the sharing of positions as specified in schedule 3 to the Bill. That removes any potential for doubt or manipulation and ensures that each approach is applied consistently across all councils.

He was the first to raise the issue of the qualified vote, although many after him did so, and what council decisions might be subject to it. Building on my commitment to ensure that the interests of minority communities are protected, the following decisions will be specified as requiring a qualified majority vote: the political governance arrangements to be operated by the council; the method

to be used for the sharing of positions of responsibility; the method to be used for ensuring that the membership of a committee reflects the political balance on a council; major capital projects; programmes that impact across a number of district electoral areas; and, in response to a legitimate call-in, on adverse impact grounds. He also asked about the change in the 15% level to the call-in. Any proposed changes to the percentage of Members required to request the consideration of a decision will be subject to agreement by the Executive and the draft affirmation process in the Assembly.

Mr Boylan also touched on community planning, with particular reference to planning in communities in border areas. The councils will be responsible for the delivery of services to the community in the local government district. There is nothing to prevent a council working on a voluntary basis with a local authority in the South, and there will not be. He wondered to what extent the new community planning powers will compel statutory bodies not only to participate but to deliver real outcomes. A duty is being placed on specified statutory bodies to participate and support community planning. Community planning is, however, about councils, as the locally elected body, building relationships with the other partner organisations to identify not just what should be done but what can be done in the short term and over a longer time frame. In doing so, there needs to be recognition that statutory bodies are answerable to those who provide their funding and determine the priorities that that funding should be used to address.

Community planning is about how the partner organisations, in delivering their functions and responsibilities, can support the objectives identified in the community plan. It is also about the various partner organisations working to align, as far as is practicable, their short-term strategic objectives and targets.

Another point that was made, which was raised later by Dolores Kelly, was around the effective engagement of statutory partners. I have to re-emphasise that it is about building relationships between the elected representatives and officers of councils and the key individuals in the other organisations. It would not be appropriate for me to specify who should represent the interest of a body in the community planning process. I know that you said that it should be the chief executive or someone high up. It is not our place to specify that, but you would like to think that councils, councillors and council officers can develop relationships and get in people of that stature and authority.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for giving way. Experience in local government tells us that, when you try to bring other statutory bodies together, the normal process involves the chief executive or senior officer but, as one of my colleagues said, further into the process, you are dealing with a junior clerk. Surely there needs to be a process to ensure that that is not allowed to be the case. I know that it will be hard to legislate for that, but surely there has to be some process.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the intervention. I agree with him. It is a frustration that I, too, experienced as a councillor, particularly in the neighbourhood renewal process when other agencies were not playing their part fully and often left the Department for Social Development to carry the can. There are mechanisms

in place. Departments still have responsibility for those involved in community planning. So, for example, it could be up to the Education Minister to pull up someone who is not delivering in respect of education in the community planning process. That oversight still exists. I would like to think that, through the partnership panel, it could be raised at ministerial level if some agency is not pulling its weight and not coming up with solutions to problems.

The next contributor to the debate was my colleague Dolores Kelly, who spoke in support of the Bill. She spoke about the importance of safeguards for minorities. Those are essential and are at the core of the Bill, and they were in our thoughts in bringing it forward.

She focused on capacity building and asked whether there would be mandatory training for councillors. All councillors will be encouraged to participate in the menu of training and capacity-building options that are being developed in conjunction with local government. There will be mandatory training for councillors in some specific areas of responsibility. For example, any councillor sitting on a planning committee will be required to undergo mandatory training in the legal framework on which planning decisions are made and in his or her role in the decision-making process. That measure is to protect councillors as much as it is to protect the council. There will also be mandatory training for statutory transition committees regarding the appointment of chief executives.

Mrs Kelly suggested that there should be a mandatory register of interests for councillors. Provision will be included in the mandatory code of conduct that interests must be registered by councillors. The register will be monitored by the clerk of the relevant council.

Mrs Kelly asked whether the bar on the dual mandate would extend to Members of the House of Lords. I can happily say that the Bill does not extend the bar on the dual mandate to Members of the House of Lords; this is not an elected position.

6.15 pm

Another question that was asked was how can the transfer of assets be maximised for the benefit of the whole district? I believe that the recoupling of planning regeneration and local economic development, together with the new power of community planning, will provide local government with a real opportunity to maximise benefit for all of its ratepayers. New councils will need to consider the important role that physical assets will play, not just those that they will inherit from their predecessor councils but those from central government. Community planning will provide the framework for that.

Mrs Kelly raised concerns about executive arrangements and governance. Regulations and standing orders will require that, where a council has chosen the executive model, the executive of the council is required to publish a forward work programme and a decision when it is taken. That will ensure that the other members of the council will be aware of how the executive operates.

The next contributor was Mr Elliott. He, quite rightly, spoke of and paid tribute to the role of councils and councillors during our troubled past. I would like to acknowledge that and be associated with his remarks in that regard. Moving on from the last point about training being provided to STCs in the appointment of chief executives, Mr Elliott

raised a concern about the selection panels for the appointment of chief executives. The remit of the Local Government Staff Commission has been expanded to cover STCs. Those committees must consult with the commission on the composition of the interview panels to ensure fair representation. Each panel will consist of: the chair of the STC; between four and seven members of the statutory transition committee; two representatives of the staff commission; and an independent assessor appointed by the staff commission. Those three final members will be there to ensure that the appointments process is fair and equitable, but they will not have any voting rights. Members of the interview panel and the full statutory transition committee will have mandatory training in the appointment process, so that they are fully aware of the requirements of employment law.

Finally, the decisions to seek ratification of the full statutory transition committee by a majority of 60% is designed to ensure that no one constituent council in the statutory transition committee can overly influence the outcome of the appointment process.

Like Lord Morrow after him, Mr Elliott raised concerns about the timing of the Bill, and whether it must be passed before the elections. If the Bill is not passed prior to the elections, could MLAs, MPs and MEPs, stand for election in the 2014 elections? As I mentioned earlier, elections are an excepted matter; however, the Secretary of State will bring forward legislation within the next few weeks to move the date of the election to 2014. It is not essential for this Bill to be in place prior to the elections to enable the elections to take place; however, it would be very desirable for the Bill to have received Royal Assent prior to the elections, so that the new governance arrangements and ethical standards framework will apply as soon as the new councils are elected. Whether the dual mandate provisions will apply will depend on when the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Mr Elliott asked how costs for transferring functions would be identified. Each Department will be responsible, both for the costs of transferring functions and for identifying the basis on which the costs will be apportioned across each council area. The transfer of functions working group is commissioning a due diligence exercise to validate the information provided by each Department. That third-party verification of costs will provide reassurance that the settlement is fair and equitable.

Mr Elliott is of the opinion that some of the language in the Bill in relation to the code of conduct is permissive rather than mandatory. In relation to when the code will apply, the Bill specifies that the Department may issue a code. Yes, the Bill does state that the Department may issue a code. I can assure you that the Department intends to issue a code. The Bill also provides that the Department cannot issue a code unless a draft of it has been laid before, and approved by, the Assembly. The Department will bring the code to the Assembly after the Bill receives Royal Assent. The Bill also states that the code must specify the principles that will govern councillors' conduct.

The qualified majority vote was raised. Mr Elliott flagged up the provision in the legislation to amend the 80% and asked for what reasons that might change. The enabling power that I am taking to alter the percentage will be used only if there is clear evidence in the future that that level results in councils being unable to progress business effectively.

On governance, forms of governance and a permitted form of governance, it will be for each council and the parties represented on it to decide whether it wishes to use a committee system or the executive arrangements that we have already discussed. The regulation that will specify the function that may be the responsibility of the executive will be drafted on a uniform basis and will apply to all councils. The establishment of executive arrangements will not prevent a council from establishing committees for the discharge of other functions.

Mr Elliott and, again, Lord Morrow raised the question of why a chairperson or vice chairperson of a council could not be a member of an executive, if a council chooses to adopt that style of governance arrangement. The proposed executive of a council will be a significant aspect of the political decision-making structure. The chairman or mayor and the vice-chairperson are appointed annually as the most senior civic representative of the council as a whole. I do not consider that it would be appropriate for a councillor who holds that position also to be directly involved in the political decision-making structure. The operation of executive arrangements here will be somewhat different from those in place in England, where there is provision for a directly elected mayor who acts as the chair of the new executive.

Lord Morrow made a very welcome contribution to the debate. He described this as a hefty piece of legislation and referred to the work that had been done in Dungannon and south Tyrone, where there has not been a rate increase in four years. I am sure that lots would like to learn from that and, indeed, replicate it. He, like Mr Elliott, paid tribute to the work of councils over the years. He asked whether there was a legal position and, if so, what it was, and whether there was a statutory obligation on councils to have reserves. The Department issued guidance on reserves, setting a recommended limit of between 5% and 7.5% of their operating budget. However, that is not a statutory requirement. The current level of reserves in local government is just over £84 million, of which around £28 million has been earmarked. It is for each council to determine its own level of debt. However, the local government auditor will consider debt levels in each council to ensure that no council goes beyond its ability to service its debts. I think that £0.5 billion was the amount mentioned for current debts in local government, but it amounts to approximately £495 million — so it was close.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for giving way. On the point around reserves, there is some misunderstanding in relation to whether a council has a statutory obligation to have reserves in place. I am asking the Minister a question, but I am not demanding an answer here today. Does he agree that it would be advisable for councils to have reserves for contingency situations? It seems strange that there is no statutory obligation on a council to have those reserves. Does he agree that they should have?

Mr Durkan: I agree that it would be sensible and prudent for councils to have reserves for use in contingencies or emergencies.

Like others before and after him, Lord Morrow spoke about the importance of community planning and of avoiding the potential isolation of rural communities and the difficulties in planning for disparate communities within the new boundaries. The framework and the guidance will support the development of local area plans within

a council's community plan. The community plan must take into account the needs of all areas of a new council. He also touched on the role of elected representatives in community planning. Councillors will be the key drivers in the community planning process. I understand his point about other public representatives who were not necessarily elected having similar if not greater rights than councillors in some bodies at the moment.

Lord Morrow asked why a bar was being placed on being a councillor if a person already holds the elected position of MLA, MP or MEP. I have been asking that question of my officials over the past week because there is a human rights argument for council employees. I thought that the idea was that we are not human; I do not know whether that means that we are superhuman or subhuman.

The dual mandate of a councillor who is also an MLA could cause potential conflicts of interest in decision-making whereby the Assembly might wish to set a policy direction that is at odds with the view of local government. The main political parties in Northern Ireland have either pledged to end the practice by 2015 or indicated that they will take a phased approach as the most suitable way to address the issue. Executive colleagues have given their support to a bar on dual mandates being included in the Bill. It would seem appropriate to resolve the issue of dual mandates in the context of the move to a reduced number of councils with additional roles and functions, as is planned for in the Bill. We have obtained legal advice on whether the bar on dual mandates breached human rights legislation, and it does not.

Lord Morrow also asked for some clarity on the circumstances under which the public and the press might be excluded from council meetings. The provisions that apply to councils are over 40 years old, and it is undoubtedly time that they were updated. There have been recent complaints in some areas that councils have misused the provisions of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 to exclude the public and the press. It is, of course, appropriate that the public and the press are excluded when confidential matters or matters of a certain nature, particularly those that relate to a specific individual, are being discussed. The new provisions set out more precisely the circumstances under which that can occur in the future. Those provisions can be looked at in detail during the Bill's Committee Stage to ensure that a robust framework is in place.

Mr Milne asked questions about the partnership panel. My officials will be working with NILGA to develop the procedures for the operation of the panel and to determine how partnership working can best be delivered. He also asked questions, as did other Members, about the new complaints framework, how much it would cost, and who would pay for the work of the commissioner of complaints.

The October 2009 PwC economic appraisal of local government service delivery gave indicative costs for the proposed new ethical standards framework of £800,000: £50,000 for each of the new councils and £250,000 for additional resources and the commissioner's office.

It is estimated that the total cost of the revised framework will be £380,000. The Department has put in place arrangements to provide funding for the initial set-up costs, and I have included provisions that councils will pay for the yearly costs incurred by the commissioner's office.

6.30 pm

Ian McCrea spoke about community planning and the need for it to be focused at a local level. Community planning provides the opportunity to better link regional and local priorities, with councils, Departments and statutory bodies working together to deliver those priorities for people on the ground, which is the most important point. I think that I dealt with Mr McCrea's other points when dealing with points made by other Members.

Alasdair McDonnell spoke in support of the Bill, but not without reservation. He said that in order to have people's full confidence, councils must reflect and respect their wishes. That was a very true and very appropriate contribution. Importantly, Dr McDonnell said that bad history must not be allowed to repeat itself, and he was not the only person to say that. Members who spoke in opposition to the Bill also said that, and we all have a duty to ensure that that does not happen.

Basil McCrea asked why we were introducing the Bill and said that it appeared that we were trying to devolve dysfunctionality. I certainly hope that that is not the case, and it is definitely not my intention. I hope that we are devolving power and authority, and the ability to be creative, make solutions and better serve the needs of people on the ground. Local government does that better than the Assembly.

The same Member asked questions about flag flying — I will come to that later — and the selection of chief executives, which I think I addressed. Those are significant issues. There is a fear out there and in here — I heard it today, and where I did not hear it, I sensed it — that an abuse of power by a majority, whatever majority that might be, will dictate those very important issues in the respective councils.

Basil McCrea also expressed concerns about the number of councils and asked what the rationale was for that number. The previous Executive settled on 11 councils because it was believed that 11 struck a measured and reasonable balance between minimising the range of variants that exists between councils, including population and rating income, while promoting and strengthening the links between councils and their communities. That decision was supported by the current Executive.

Basil and Ian McCrea raised concerns about some councils taking on the debt burden of others. On April 1 2015, all assets and liabilities of existing councils will move to the newly formed 11 councils. Those will include debts and reserves, and that is why I have introduced expenditure controls on existing councils, whereby significant spend will have to be agreed by the relevant STC. That is also why the Bill will strengthen controls on borrowing and the use of reserves by existing councils and the new councils operating in shadow mode.

Both Mr McCreas and Cathal Boylan sought detail on the functions that will transfer. The Executive, when agreeing the package of functions, also agreed that the relevant Ministers should provide details of the staff and resources that would transfer within that function. My Department has received baseline information from each Department that will transfer functions. The information submitted provides details of the resources, budgets, staff and assets attached to the package of functions that will transfer to local government. Work is under way to undertake a

detailed due diligence review of the baseline information provided.

My Department is working closely with DFP to develop a mechanism to transfer the budgets relating to transferring functions to councils with minimum bureaucracy. It is not intended that that is done through a technical amendment to rating legislation, which will ensure that the commitment to transfer functions on a rates-neutral basis at point of transfer is met. I intend to propose an amendment at Consideration Stage to implement that.

Peter Weir made a very authoritative contribution and subsequent interventions. That is not surprising, given his experience on the Committee and on the various other panels and committees that he outlined he served on. He welcomed the independent complaints procedure and spoke of the governance issues. Drawing again on his experience, he thought that it was right to have a choice and that one size does not fit all — different areas and different councils will propose different methods that they will be more comfortable with.

He also spoke about the need to protect minorities and said that the correct balance must be struck between the qualified majorities and protecting the minorities and allowing councils to do their business. He used the term, “gridlock” and said that it was vital that the proposed legislation, although it protects minorities, is not abused to the extent that it causes gridlock in councils and stops councils’ good work being done. However, as Mr Weir suggested, we need to examine in Committee how best to move that forward. As I said to Ms Lo, I look forward to working with the Committee at and through the next stage of the Bill to improve it in any way that we can.

Mr Weir asked how we would ensure appropriate representation on the partnership panel. It will be for each council to nominate a member to represent its interests at partnership panel meetings. It is not for the Minister to determine that, although the Department will be responsible for confirming the appointment. Attendance at the meetings will be open to all Ministers. However, it is anticipated that actual attendance will depend on the items that are tabled for discussion. Provision is made for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, acting jointly, to nominate Ministers or junior Ministers to attend particular meetings of the panel if they consider it appropriate.

Mr Weir also asked whether my Department would be able to block a council’s nomination for its representation on the partnership panel. Again, however, it will be for the individual council and its members to decide who should represent their interests on the partnership panel. My Department’s role is simply to confirm that nominated councillor’s appointment.

Stewart Dickson spoke of past bad practice and of the hope that lessons had been learned. He spoke of the importance of the code of conduct and lamented the fact that he thought that annual improvement reports focused too much on financial performance and not enough on other aspects of a council’s performance. The improvement plan will look at all aspects of improvement, not just at financial matters, and there is a clear link between community planning objectives and performance improvement in the delivery of services. He expressed the concern that council officers might “go native”. In addition to the code of conduct for councillors, there will be a code

of conduct for officers to ensure that all those working in local government will be clear on their respective roles and responsibilities. The code of conduct for officers is being developed through the local government reform joint forum.

My party colleague Mr Maginness spoke of the proposed executive model, which is one of the choices that is available for the governance of the new councils.

He felt that the scrutiny role of the executive that would be given to councillors could lead to a healthier political environment. As regards the control of councils, he was wary of Departments acting in a Big Brother fashion. It is certainly not the intention of the Bill for this Department or any Department to constrain, but it is necessary that we have oversight if individual councils ignore government policy.

Mr McGlone spoke of the importance of building trust and reconciliation. Mr Maginness asked why the provisions relating to the control of councils were being extended to all Departments. With the new functions being transferred to local government, it was agreed with the transferring Departments that it would be helpful if the supervisory powers in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 were made available to all Northern Ireland Departments. It is intended that those powers will be used only in extreme circumstances. They are powers of last resort when a council is in default.

With reference to the partnership panel, Mr Maginness asked why, when we are meant to be streamlining public administration, we are creating a new body. The establishment of the partnership panel is about providing a structured forum to enable Ministers and elected representatives to work together at political level to identify how we can best deliver improved outcomes for our community. It will be a forum for discussion and will provide an opportunity for the exchange of advice in both directions. The elected representatives on the panel will report to the councils they represent. Ministers may wish to raise relevant issues with the Executive or, through their departmental officials, with the relevant Committee.

John McCallister expressed his opposition to the Bill and reiterated concerns raised by quite a few Members — even those in favour of the Bill — but particularly by his colleague, Mr McCrea. He queried the transfer of planning to local government. The House has already confirmed its agreement to the transfer of planning to councils. The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which was prepared by the Department and received Royal Assent on 4 May 2011, provides the legislative basis for the reform of the Northern Ireland planning system and its transfer to councils. The Act also gives effect to the transfer to councils of the majority of planning functions and decision-making responsibilities for local development plans, development management and planning enforcement. This will make planning more locally accountable, giving local politicians the opportunity to shape the areas in which they were elected. Decision-making processes will be improved by bringing in enhanced understanding of the needs and aspirations of local communities. Many provisions in the Act will commence on the transfer of planning functions to local councils in 2015.

Like others before him, Mr McCallister asked whether the 11-council model was the appropriate model. It is no secret

to anyone in the House that it was not my party's preferred model. However, models for each of the seven-, 11- and 15-council configurations were consulted on.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he clarify what his party's position was in its 2011 manifesto?

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not get into manifestos. Let us stay on the Second Stage of the Bill. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us not have debate, wherever Members may be sitting in the Chamber. Allow the Minister to continue. Let us not get into a debate around manifestos.

6.45 pm

Mr McCallister: Will the Minister give way? It is not about manifestos. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Durkan: Yes.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister. Does his point about not supporting the council model not reinforce our point that he is actually devolving functions when he is against the model for which he is legislating?

Mr Durkan: If I am not mistaken, I said that we had not been in favour of the 11-council model. The seven-, 11- and 15-council configurations were consulted on. The former Executive's decisions on the future shape of local government, which were announced in March 2008, included rationalising the 26 local government districts to create 11 new districts, along the lines of model 11B. The alternative models, which would have created seven and 15 new councils — models 11A and 11C — were rejected by the former Executive. That decision is supported by the current Executive. The House, by agreeing the Local Government (Boundaries) Act 2008, agreed the 11-council model.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for giving way. On Fermanagh District Council, I know that there was considerable opposition from Sinn Féin members to it being fused with any other council —

Mr Speaker: Order. I must insist that the Member takes his seat. We really must not get into a discussion on individual councils, past or present. We really need to get back to the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill. I say that to all Members. Allow the Minister to continue.

Mr Durkan: Thank you for that, Mr Speaker. I thank Members for their attempted interventions. All day, we have tried to avoid getting into disputes in specific areas. I am content that I have come this far without doing that; I do not intend to do it now.

The House further confirmed its support for an 11-council model when it affirmed the Local Government (Boundaries) Order 2012.

John McCallister expressed concerns, as did some others, about the costs of reform. The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of local government service delivery that was carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009 indicated that, under the preferred option — transformation with regional collaboration — implementation of the local government reform programme could cost up to £118 million over five years. That is against projected savings of £438 million over 25 years. One of the finance working group's key tasks is to develop an up-to-date and accurate analysis

of the full costs and benefits of the reform implementation programme. To do that, local government has developed a template and accompanying guidelines for individual councils and transition committees to accurately establish the costs of reform. The returns are being examined and analysed to validate the data. That will provide an up-to-date estimate of the full cost of implementing reform of local government.

Mr Allister lamented the fact that we did not go with the 15-council model. I have addressed how we arrived at the 11-council model. He conveyed an interesting theory for why that was the case. He queried the devolution of power to an executive in the new governance arrangements. Regulations will specify the functions that may be the responsibility of the executive. It will be for a council to determine which functions are devolved. There will also be a range of functions that will be discharged by committees. He asked which decisions would be subject to a qualified majority vote. Building on my commitment to ensure that the interests of minority communities are protected, the following decisions will be specified as requiring a qualified majority vote: the political governance arrangements to be operated by the council; the method to be used for the sharing of positions of responsibility; the method to be used for ensuring that the membership of a committee reflects the political balance on the council; major capital projects; programmes that impact across a number of district electoral areas; and, in response to a legitimate call-in, on adverse impact grounds.

Mr Allister asked me a direct question about whether I am minded to make regulations on flag-flying. No, I am not minded to make regulations on flag-flying. I am flagging now, unfortunately. *[Laughter.]* The Bill deals with improving services to local people and improving local government, and I do not see any merit in attaching regulations on flag-flying to do that. There are other forums where that can be discussed and, hopefully, resolved, one of which is the political reference group, to which I know that the Member has previously been invited, although I am led to believe that he has not attended. However, its next meeting is tomorrow, and I would be more than happy to see him and any Member from any party there.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

Mr Allister: I also asked the Minister whether he is minded, under clause 42, to make any regulations that would bring any council decisions on the issue of flags under the ambit of qualified majority. Can he answer that question?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. At present, I am not minded to do so. I am happy to see how discussions go in other forums. I referred to the political reference group. We also have an ongoing process through the Haass talks, from which I am hopeful of an outcome. These are very serious issues, and the Member is right to raise them — the issue of flags, that is, perhaps not the flags themselves. At Committee Stage, the Member will have an opportunity to bring amendments and suggestions to me on how we might progress the issue or otherwise.

Mr Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: I am happy enough not to give way now, Mr Speaker. The finish line is in sight.

The final contributor this evening was Mr Nesbitt. He raised concerns about the costs of the commissioner for complaints post. The intention to ask local government to pay those costs was discussed and agreed with the commissioner's office. My officials are in ongoing discussions on the detail of the payment method. He asked other, more specific questions about Dr Frawley, and I will get back to him in writing on those.

In concluding, I again thank Members for their contributions to the debate and for comments made or concerns expressed regarding the Bill. I also take this opportunity to emphasise the benefits that the Bill will provide and the advantages that it will create for local government and the communities that it serves. It will provide our 11 new councils with the powers to be stronger, more creative and more effective in delivering services to their citizens. They will be able to imaginatively produce initiatives to boost their local economy and create jobs, protect the environment and enhance their citizens' well-being. Community planning will enable councils to work in partnership with other public service providers to develop and implement a vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the district. For the first time, sharing council positions of responsibility across political parties and independents will be enshrined in law. The public will now have more access to council meetings and documents. A mandatory code of conduct for councillors will be introduced that will promote high standards. Establishing a partnership panel made up of Executive Ministers and elected representatives from councils will enable the two tiers of government to discuss matters of mutual interest.

I see the Bill as a valuable and significant step in our journey to modernise local government. It will impact on every aspect of local government operation and provide the opportunity for councils to lead the improvements and the delivery of high-quality services that will benefit their communities. It will shape the future for strong, modern, community-focused local government in Northern Ireland that will have the opportunity to deliver improved outcomes for everyone. I commend the Bill to you.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 64; Noes 12.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Ms J McCann, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Elliott and Mr Kinahan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill [NIA 28/11-15] be agreed.

Adjourned at 7.09 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 7 October 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Alex Attwood replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Fearghal McKinney replace Mr Alban Maginness as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Alban Maginness replace Mrs Dolores Kelly as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Joe Byrne replace Mrs Dolores Kelly as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; and that Mr Alex Attwood be appointed as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Committee Business

Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 11 December 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 27/11-15].

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill passed its Second Stage on 24 September 2013 and should, under the 30-working-day rule, complete its Committee Stage on 30 November 2013. The Bill's main intention is to amend the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act 2009 to reflect the purpose for which the Business Services Organisation (BSO) was established. The proposals will allow BSO to provide support services to all Departments' arm's-length bodies and to administer health and social care functions on behalf of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

At its meeting on 25 September, the Committee agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals. Although the Bill is likely to be a straightforward piece of legislation designed to put measures in place to correct certain oversights or gaps identified in the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act 2009, the Committee feels that it is essential that it is afforded the time to exercise its scrutiny powers to the full. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I ask that the House supports the motion to extend the Committee Stage to 11 December 2013.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 11 December 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 27/11-15].

Private Members' Business

Town Centre Strategy

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

Mrs Cochrane: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the ongoing pressures on small businesses, in particular, those in the retail sector; notes the current and forthcoming policies and programmes in relation to business rates, planning, business improvement districts, public transport, the development of shared space and urban regeneration; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to produce an overarching strategy for town centres, high streets and urban villages to ensure the effective coordination of the current and future initiatives.

I am pleased to move the motion today. I hope that all parties will unite in seeing the importance of the issue. The performance of our small business sector is crucial to the performance of the Northern Ireland economy as a whole in output, value added, productivity, innovation and employment. Therefore, we must be doing all we can to support small businesses.

In particular, town and city centres are battling against the changing nature of retailing and consumerism in Northern Ireland, the pressure of which is becoming unbearable for many small businesses and retailers struggling to keep their doors open. One in seven shops on the high street is now lying empty.

There are many challenges, especially with online retailing. The Policy Exchange report titled '21st Century Retail Policy', which was published just last month, revealed that, in six years, online retail has quadrupled as a share of retail spending and continues to rise. In short, we are increasingly satisfying our consumer needs with the touch of a button. Our businesses and independent retailers, therefore, need to adapt to that trend by investing in their online services and creating an online presence where they can.

More importantly, they need to ensure that a trip to the high street is a positive, broader experience. The Forum for Alternative Belfast has already completed some noteworthy work around that in its mission to ensure a more equitable built environment in Belfast. We can look to the likes of Arthur Street as a good example of what Belfast city could look like. It has the right mix of professional services, hospitality hubs, leisure and retail. However, that mix is not always easily achievable. We have a range of small businesses with boundless potential, but the potential and enthusiasm are not always matched by public sector support or the appropriate legislative environment. It is becoming increasingly clear that Northern Ireland requires a single and unequivocal

strategy for town centres, high streets and urban villages as we move further into the 21st century.

I am not suggesting that our Executive are not giving that area thought. Indeed, we have a mix of government policy from the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Department of the Environment (DOE), the Department for Regional Development (DRD), the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) etc, all of which share a common thread: they are determined to protect our town and city centres. However, there is an absence of proper coordination. We need to tie things together to achieve maximum impact. The problem is that we have numerous Departments responsible for town centre regeneration and the economy but no one Department taking the lead.

At the beginning of last year, the Department for Social Development published the high street task force report, which was inspired by the 2011 Portas review in GB. It set out a broad range of recommendations aimed at improving the coordination of city and town centre management and prioritising regeneration initiatives. A significant issue highlighted in the report was the adverse impact on city and town centres of what is perceived as an imbalanced spatial planning policy. Consultation with Northern Ireland's high street retailers revealed that the growth in planning approvals for out-of-centre retail and subsequent development over the past 20 years was considered to be enticing shoppers away from the city and town centres due to things such as free car parking and giving those flagship stores an unfair advantage. That type of thinking is reflected in DOE's updated town centre and retail planning policy.

Equally, DRD strongly acknowledges the importance of our town and city centres in its 'Regional Development Strategy 2035', which sets the framework for development plans. We must, therefore, ensure that amendments to the Planning Bill do not contradict the "town and city centre first" mantra. Planning changes are also required to make it easier to convert empty shops into homes, and for cafes and restaurants to introduce temporary outside seating to be able to create the right mix and entice people to our high streets. The Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill will be a good opportunity to create that welcoming atmosphere and encourage people to visit an area.

Other key measures that will affect the regeneration of town centres and high streets include the sensible location of bus routes and stops near local amenities, easy and secure cycle storage and cycle lanes, nearby parking, and facilities for pedestrians such as zebra crossings and well-maintained pavements. However, all of those things need to be progressed in a joined-up manner.

Money has been poured into public realm works, and, although I welcome that, particularly in my constituency of East Belfast, such upgrades are often targeted only at areas of extreme deprivation. With no other developments to allow investment potential to be fully realised, you can end up with nice pavements in an area where nothing else is going on. In contrast, you have areas where businesses have got together and are working very hard to develop a real sense of community, but they are some way down the priority list for other investment.

With an overarching strategy and a lead Department, we might see a different approach to some of these things and investment in areas where the private sector is already

working hard. Where we see a true success story, we can share the enthusiasm in other areas. I have seen examples of that in areas such as Ballyhackamore, where one businesswoman, Brenda Shankey, has been a key driver of change in the village and has been willing to go out to other traders' associations, share her experience and encourage them to get on board and do something, too.

Another positive initiative by the Assembly was the recent passage of the business improvement districts (BIDs) legislation. That is a very positive move for Northern Ireland because it provides small businesses and retailers with the ability to exert more control over space on the high street. However, it is important that the outworkings of the legislation are closely evaluated to ensure successful delivery. It is our role as politicians to support the small businesses in our constituencies to drive the success of BIDs and to ensure the sustainability of the high street. As local government reform looms, we need to remind local authorities that BIDs must remain a strong priority. Therefore, I welcome the Social Development Minister's recent decision to appoint a consortium to provide support for capacity-building in areas to take forward BIDs from inception to implementation.

Recent initiatives by DFP are also welcome, including the enhancement of the small business rate relief scheme, which has brought in 8,300 extra ratepayers, providing them with 20% relief. The introduction of the empty retail premises concession, which will allow a 50% exemption on rates for the first year, is also to be welcomed. That is being created to help long-term empty retail premises back into business.

I also want to mention the recently published 'Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework'. It creates an overarching context within which DSD programmes will be formulated, but it needs to be widened out to include other Departments' policies that are complementary to the aim of strengthening our towns, cities, high streets and urban villages. A proper strategic vision is essential to securing the future of our evolving high streets, and, in tough financial times, we need energetic, entrepreneurial and truly collaborative partnerships across all of the relevant Departments and private sector bodies.

Finally, I will mention the amendment. If it were an addition to the motion, it would be fine to accept it. It is very important to recognise the role of councils in this matter, and, indeed, their role is set to increase. However, I feel very strongly that there is a need for an overarching framework at a regional level to coordinate interventions, and, unfortunately, the proposed amendment drops that key point out of the motion.

I am calling for a single overarching strategy to protect and enhance our town and city centres, high streets and urban villages. As I have mentioned, a number of policies are in place across different Departments but, although they are well intentioned, things are not moving quickly enough for our businesses. We need a lead Department to provide a greater focus on this very important issue to ensure a joined-up implementation process and deliver results for our businesses and traders. An interdepartmental group that brings together the key people responsible for urban and economic regeneration in the various Departments can ensure that the work of all Departments and their policies will complement one other and that they will be

progressed in a joined-up manner. I urge all parties to support the motion.

12.15 pm

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "regeneration;" and insert:

"further notes that the majority of local authorities have extensive town centre plans; and calls on the Minister for Social Development and the Executive to enable these plans by utilising all the funding mechanisms at their disposal."

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm tacaíocht a thabhairt don leasú ar an rún.

Businesses throughout the region have been working their way through a very tough economic climate, and times have been extremely challenging. We do not give enough credit and support to our retail sector, particularly the independent sector, which employs thousands of people across the North, and not just in our cities and regional towns but in the smaller towns and villages.

You can imagine how disheartening it must have been for businesspeople throughout the North to see the Minister responsible for business improvement districts standing behind a speaker calling for civil disobedience. That Minister might take the opportunity today to give businesspeople some reassurance and to disassociate himself from those remarks.

I agree with the proposer of the motion that we need better cooperation and global thinking in policy terms at the Executive table. I draw Mrs Cochrane's attention to the fact that the amendment refers to the Executive. Our inclusion of the word implies that there should be a coordinated policy from all the relevant Departments. That is why we put emphasis on the Executive. Not only that, we also need to be realistic. If we want to achieve real change and make progress, there have to be resources available. Fine words are very welcome at times, but resources are even more welcome.

Sometimes we hear of duplication right across government — numerous efforts being made by numerous bodies to do the same thing. We would certainly support the Executive coordinating policies to ensure that all Departments work to the same end, particularly in supporting city- and town-centre businesses, and, indeed, those in the smaller villages and towns.

I welcome the thrust of today's debate and recognise that the Department for Social Development will be the lead Department, but I am concerned that DSD's remit covers only our larger areas of population. What I hear most frequently is that the same cities and towns always seem to be the focus of our efforts and that we need to broaden the scope of our work to include our rural towns and villages so that they are not left behind in any coordinated strategy or initiative.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want a bit of clarification on how the amendment seems to dispose of the call in the motion for an overarching strategy. Will you explain that? We support your amendment in principle, but we are concerned that it would do away with an essential part of the motion.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention. I thought that I had explained that. The fact that we have asked the Executive to enable the plans implies that the Executive should coordinate the efforts of all Ministers involved. I hope that that explains it clearly to the Member and removes any misunderstanding that he may have had.

I believe that we need to see the Department for Social Development, the Department for Regional Development, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the Department of the Environment, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department of Finance and Personnel under the direction of the Executive, working around the table in a cohesive way.

In specific areas where public realm schemes are being brought forward that will see the loss of on-street parking, we need to seek alternative parking to ensure that areas are not disadvantaged. A case in point is the public realm scheme on Merchants Quay in Newry, where quite a number of parking spaces are being removed and traders find it difficult to see where those are being replaced. There is another example of that in Armagh, where Market Street has seen blue badge holders and disabled drivers being able to park on that street.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Bradley for giving way. I appreciate and support what he is saying about a cooperative approach. However, does he accept that it does not always take direct finance to resolve some of the issues and make matters better? A wee bit of flexibility within Departments can always go a long way, particularly in Planning Service, to help some of those aspects in town centres.

Mr D Bradley: I accept the point the Member makes that flexibility is always welcome. However, if you talk to the traders on the high street, they will tell you that they want to see greater support through resources being made available. I will make that clear later.

I agree that we need to see greater coordination on public transport. We need to see our bus and rail services accommodate shoppers better, especially shoppers from rural communities coming into towns. Indeed, it is unfortunate that recent changes in street parking charging have created a barrier to shoppers in town centres rather than facilitating them. I raised that issue during an Adjournment debate, specifically in relation to Newry city.

We would like to see an expansion of the small business rate relief scheme to include even more businesses across the North. We believe that another look should be given to the empty properties rate relief scheme, so that it too can be extended to give greater incentive and support to businesses, especially new businesses.

Under the review of public administration (RPA), major elements of urban regeneration will transfer to the new councils. That is why we have included them in the amendment. As I said, they too need to be brought into the mix. They need to ensure that the work they do is in partnership with and complements the work of all the other agencies and Departments involved. It should no longer be good enough for sponsoring Departments to say that they have consulted with one Department or another. What is needed is that they all work together in partnership to deliver a coordinated strategy that protects and enhances our town centres and villages, allows for expansion and

development and, at the same time, encourages shoppers to come in to the centre of their local towns and villages.

With that, I will end. Go raibh maith agat as an deis labhartha.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Social Development Committee, I support the amendment.

For many years, small businesses have been the lifeblood of our communities, from the small corner shop, which helped in many ways to develop and maintain community cohesion, to those businesses on our high street that have, in the past, taken on an active role in supporting the communities that support them. In the past number of years, the pressure on small businesses, especially in the retail sector, has grown to such a level that businesses are crying out for support, on both a local and regional level. As someone who once owned a small business, I am particularly sympathetic and acutely aware of how worrying a time it is for those who have developed their entrepreneurial ability and nurtured their small business but now face these tough economic times.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

The threats to small businesses come not just from the decrease in people's disposable income but from the rise of the multinationals, which benefit far more greatly from economies of scale than small businesses could ever hope to, and the increasing popularity of out of town, one-stop shopping centres, which can develop free parking as an incentive with which our town centres cannot compete. That, coupled with the rise of internet shopping, favours larger businesses. That is not to say that these do not have an important place in our economy, but there has to be a balancing act to ensure that the growth of one of these does not lead to a disproportionate decrease in small businesses in our high streets and town centres. This is, without doubt, a very difficult balancing act, but it is one that must be attempted.

To that end, the Department for Social Development has spearheaded a number of initiatives to help small businesses in our communities to address the challenges and feel confident about their role in the Northern Ireland economy. Those include developing strategies around business improvement districts, which have been proven over time to work in helping small businesses, improvements in public transport to make it easier for people to access their local shops without having to take the car, and urban regeneration to tackle the message that vacant properties emit to local people and potential visitors and investors.

The Department has been proven to be proactive in addressing those challenges and providing solutions that are within its remit. However, as I highlighted, the challenges of our small businesses do not come from just one source, but rather through a kaleidoscope of different situations that have developed over the past number of years. Therefore, in my opinion, it would be naive to assert that one Department has the ability to provide all the answers or solutions.

The Department has already planned for that and has worked with other agencies, such as DRD and the Department of Finance and Personnel, to develop key strategies and plans that will help to ease the situation for

small businesses. I agree that there needs to be not just cross-departmental working, but close working from local government, to regional government, to national level in order to ensure that small businesses are fully supported.

Small businesses are what Northern Ireland was built upon. During our troubled past, when investors were reluctant to come to Northern Ireland, they kept our economy functioning. Now that more peaceful times have come to Northern Ireland, we need to repay their support during our tough times by developing mechanisms to support them through their tough times, while, at the same time, ensuring that communities in Northern Ireland have maximum choices. I believe that the amendment will go a long way in achieving that.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. As a party, we have considered the amendment and I suppose will support it. I will say to the movers of the motion and the amendment that, in isolation, both are a little bit flawed, although, if merged, they would have made sense. However, in keeping with the spirit of what the movers of the motion and the amendment have said in their remarks to the Chamber, we are happy to support both.

For example, the motion does not refer in any way to the various measures that are in place in support of town centres and the retail sector and other sectors in the business community. It is unfortunate that that is not placed on the record in the motion, because there are a lot of things being done against all the pressures that have been identified. So, in one way, the motion is flawed.

The amendment specifically deletes a reference to the need for an overarching strategy, but Dominic Bradley, in his remarks to clarify, highlighted the intention behind the amendment to keep that included. So, our view is that while we would have preferred that the amendment was actually an addendum, we support both. Equally, Judith Cochrane referred specifically to a number of measures that have been put in place by various Departments and Ministers.

It is important that while we note the concerns that we all have and share and the pressures that have been repeatedly articulated to us by people in the broader business community, particularly in town centres, we still have to highlight the fact that a lot of work has been done in that regard to ease some of those burdens, and I have no doubt that more work will be done. However, as I understand it, the Social Development Minister still retains the role of lead Minister on behalf of the Executive in respect of town centre regeneration, and we know that it is a multi-departmental responsibility.

12.30 pm

Given the issues that are pointed out in the motion and have been referred to here this afternoon about various policies, which are extant or will evolve in the short time ahead, including business improvement districts and the reform of local government, it is timely to take a fresh look at departmental strategies and, equally, local authority plans for town centres, and so on. Although I do not have evidence to hand to suggest that any of the new council boundaries will be out of kilter with the town centre plans that are already agreed and on the table, in light of the fact that we will have new council boundaries very soon

in 2014, it would be wise, timely and prudent to make sure that, as we move into the new district council boundaries, the town centre plans are relevant, current and agreed by the new councils.

There is a lot of work to be done in the time ahead to ensure that all the appropriate policies are in place. We have had many a debate in the Chamber in which Members argued about the conflict between town centre development and out-of-town development. The pressures on the retail sector and other aspects of business have been well articulated. It is important that we send out a clear message from the Chamber today that all the parties are very conscious of the need to support the business and retail sectors. It is important for all of us to build the economy, which is the single highest priority for the Executive. That is why we are not prepared to divide on the amendment. Whatever about the precise wording of a motion or amendment, we need to send out a unanimous signal from the Chamber that all the parties are as one on this matter. All the Members who have spoken so far are very much agreed that we want to support the sectors that have been identified.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: I am going to run out of time; sorry, Chris.

The signal needs to be that all the parties are as one on this matter and that we want to give whatever support we can in addition to the support that we give across a range of Departments. That will be the job in the time ahead. I look forward to the Minister's response to the motion and the amendment.

Mr Copeland: I support the amendment. I speak as a retailer, as the great-grandson of retailers, as the grandson of retailers, as the son of a retailer and as the great-nephew of retailers. There were about 11 businesses in the family, some of which span back over a century. Sadly, only one of them continues to function, and, in its centenary year, the difficulties are becoming so enormous that its long-term future is in doubt.

The essential problems are a change in the market, a change in the demographics, a change in the planning structures, a change in the rates levied and a change in energy costs. Against that background, the focus of the motion is welcome. We cannot expect retailers to adapt to fundamental changes in circumstances if the policies of the Executive and our councils are not adapted to suit their needs. Strangely, retail remains the single biggest sector in the Northern Ireland economy, even though 25% of shops in our town centres are now vacant, which is a disproportionately high figure compared with the rest of the United Kingdom.

The previous Finance Minister will be praised for the expansion of the small business rate relief scheme and the empty shops rates concession. However, I call on the Department to make it known that the long-term future of those policies is assured. The level of rates that our small, often independent, retailers have to pay for the privilege of being located on the high street are often disproportionately astronomical. My party, for one, sought relief for Belfast traders when we proposed a change, but unfortunately the measure was not adopted.

One of the biggest problems with the current rating system is that it has become totally decoupled from the economic

and rental circumstances that businesses can afford. Such a detachment from reality is unsustainable. The motion raises a number of other issues. Planning, for instance, is a bugbear for many, not least because of the seemingly unending weeks and months that it takes to come to a conclusion. If the wrong decision is taken, it can have a devastating impact on small local businesses. The millions of square feet of proposed new retail space in out-of-town shopping centres, for instance, will, no matter what we say, eat a certain amount of an ever-decreasing pie and have an impact on those that remain. Although I recognise the purpose and benefits of out-of-town shopping centres, we must do all that we can to ensure that a balance is found.

Sometimes, though, Departments can display common sense. A good example of that was shown a couple of years ago, when Danny Kennedy announced that he was not going to proceed with a planned roll-out of on-street parking charges in 30 towns and cities across Northern Ireland. That is one example, but we need more initiatives like that from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Finance Minister, perhaps, and, indeed, our Social Development Minister.

I support the principle of the motion, but a so-called overarching town centre strategy should not become a byword for covering up difficult issues. With a little bit of thought and not so little effort, and given the right circumstances, I believe that it would be possible to reinvigorate our town centres.

One of the biggest criticisms that I am sure that many of us get is that once the clock hits five, our town centres shut up shop and, in many cases, become ghost towns. I think that we need to start ensuring that town centres retain their vibrancy through the evenings and the weekends, bringing about a strong night-time economy. We must also examine and, if possible, rectify the anomaly that when cruise ships, which are full of eager shoppers who are laden with foreign currency, come to dock in Belfast on a Sunday morning, those shoppers do not have anywhere to go.

There are many things that the Executive and councils could be doing to support our town centres. An overarching strategy is one, but it should be only the start of what should be a planned roll-out of new, informed and evidence-proven initiatives.

Mr Clarke: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I rise to support the motion and the amendment in the names of Dolores Kelly and Dominic Bradley. I have to say at the outset that, given that some see the revitalisation of some of the small businesses as a very important subject, which it is, I am disappointed that Dominic Bradley chose this opportunity to make a cheap political point in his opening comments.

I support the motion for many reasons, but I suppose that I come at this as someone who is a wee bit sceptical, and I probably share Alex Maskey's view about the wording of it. Although I am happy to support the emphasis of the motion, there does seem to be an awful emphasis and focus on DSD. There is no suggestion of what others have done to help the business sector. One should remember that we are probably in one of the worst economic climates that there has been, certainly in my memory of the business sector. That said, we cannot take away from what councils have done. Today, there have been criticisms of local government, but I have to say that the current

Minister for Social Development has been very supportive of Antrim Borough Council, of which I am still a member, and for which I declare an interest.

Mr Beggs: Oh?

Mr Clarke: Oh? Could you not hear that, Roy? Sorry. I am still a member, and I am proud to be. I did not run away like some of the rest of you. The Minister supported Antrim council's master plan and initiative for about £2.5 million, I think it was, of public realm works. However, all those different ideas do not necessarily bring people back to the high street.

I heard Michael Copeland singing the praises of his Minister for removing on-street parking charges in 30 town centres. I welcomed that announcement. I think that that was a wonderful idea, but I do not think that it went far enough. A bigger idea in that regard would have been to remove car parking charges, per se, except for those who are using the car parking space for parking when they go away on other business, for instance. I am thinking of the principal town in my constituency, which is Antrim. It has two large car parks, and we have a shopping centre that is dying on its feet, because of charges. We have Junction One only a mile and a half away, where people can go. They can do their shopping; they can do everything they want to do. I support the principle of Junction One, but there is a disparity between what is on offer there and what is on offer in our town centres. If you choose to go to the town centre, you have to pay for car parking, but if you go to the out-of-town shopping centres that service is free.

The aspect of the amendment that proposes bringing some of this into the Executive, as opposed to leaving it purely in the hands of the Social Development Minister, is important, because other Ministers have a part to play in relation to these changes. DOE, for instance, should have a part to play in some of the out-of-town schemes. More pressure should maybe be put on how those decisions are made and on how they play out in small towns such as Antrim and Ballyclare, which are in my constituency.

However, let us not take away from what has happened. We have had the small business rate relief scheme and the empty premises relief, whereby if a shop has been empty for more than a year, 50% rate relief will be allowed for a new business start-up. Other businesses can use vacant shops for shop displays, which does not have an impact on the rates. We have frozen the regional rate for the past six years. It gets to the stage where it is difficult to do more. We heard calls today to do more, but all the things that we wish to do come at a cost.

So it is easy for us all to sit here and say what we want, but we have to remember that, when we want something for businesses, which I support, that puts pressures on other Departments because of the moneys that they have to give up. I will leave it at that. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion and the amendment. We have all seen the serious blight that exists in the city and town centres in our constituencies. I am surprised that nobody has mentioned the Committee for Social Development's 2007 inquiry into town centre regeneration. Over a period of about 18 months, the Committee took 43 written submissions and many more oral submissions. It visited a

number of town centres and took on board that a serious crisis was gathering at that time.

Successive Ministers for Social Development sat on the results of that inquiry, even though the Assembly accepted 17 of the Committee's recommendations. If we are going to have an inquiry, it would probably be much better to dust down the recommendations that the former Committee for Social Development made and to use them as a base for any future plan or strategy.

When you go out there and talk to people, you find that a huge number of master plans already exist for town centres, city centres and villages. However, there has been a problem with trying to get Departments or whoever else is responsible to take stock and to rally round with the required resources. Like Mr Clarke, I have been to Antrim a number of times, and I have seen the difficulties that there are for towns such as Antrim, which are dying on their feet. Although there is no coherent strategy there to allow us to tackle the problem, I was recently in —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I agree entirely with what he just said. DSD invested money in north Belfast in the cultural corridor on the Crumlin Road, but Roads Service was reluctant to use a particular type of stone that DSD recommended and wanted to use tarmac. It is vital that when Roads Service, other Departments, as my colleague the Member of South Antrim said, and, to use Belfast as an example, Belfast City Council are spending money, they do so in a collaborative way so that there is maximum bang for the buck. Would you agree?

Mr F McCann: I would certainly agree. It has been difficult, but I can see the rewards of a good public realm strategy and how it has benefited Belfast City Council through its impact on the city centre.

I recently visited Kilkenny, which is a listed town. Many of its buildings go back 150 years, but the town has been able to integrate some of the major stores with the old buildings rather than having out-of-town shopping centres. That offers a flavour of the town for tourism and for local shoppers, and so on, and the town has been able to maintain that. So there are places that we can take stock of and whose good things we can pick up on.

I think that the base from which we should start, however, is the recommendations that came from the Committee for Social Development's 2007 inquiry. It speaks of the RPA and the possibility of the bigger councils taking control of their destiny as far as town centre redevelopment is concerned. However, it needs a commitment from all Departments and statutory organisations to buy into it and give it the resources, which should be ring-fenced. That will allow people to come out the other end and move away from what is a picture of dereliction, and probably depression, when they come to town centres to shop.

12.45 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Fearghal McKinney, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I support the amendment.

From Ballycastle to Belleek and from Coleraine to Crossmaglen our town centres are in deep trouble. Main streets that managed to hang on and even thrive through the bombing campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s are now falling victim to an even more deadly attack, where the damage through economic recession can be read in the prevalence of pound shops, charity shops and vacant shops.

As a society, we have deep questions to ask ourselves about the sort of towns that we want to have and are prepared to pay for. Pound shops are great and so are out-of-town hypermarkets, but they come at a price. All the flowerpots and hanging baskets in the world cannot hide the reality that many of our town centres are in serious difficulty. People are looking to the Assembly and the Executive to take a strategic perspective and do something about it.

The decline of our town centres is not just a recent problem. The proportion of local family owned businesses has been declining for decades. However, the decline has been accelerated by the economic downturn of the past few years. In the new streetscapes that are dominated by chain shops, there is an inevitable loss of character and with that comes a loss of footfall. With hindsight, we can see that ringing our town centres with anonymous windswept car parks might not have been such a good idea.

So what do people want from us? I suspect that they want a bit more than fresh paint and hanging baskets. Although many welcome the schemes that improve the appearance of some of our vacant shops, we must acknowledge that that is only for the optics. The real strategies that we should employ will have the top priorities of putting businesses back into those empty spaces and making us think and act differently in our attempts to do so.

We have to measure the sense of loss in our town centres, not just in business but in community. As Mr Copeland pointed out, there was a sense of local ownership when most businesses had been founded by families you knew and were owned and operated by your friends, neighbours and family acquaintances. People want that sense of community back. They do not want their town centres to be anonymous. That is the challenge for the Minister, but it is not one that he can meet on his own. Our greatest need, and the one thing that the Assembly could deliver, is joined-up government. By their very nature, town centres relate in one way or another to all our public agencies. Town centres are not just about the retail trade; they are the focus of tourism and are transport, social and recreational hubs. All the agencies and organisations that relate to those different aspects have their own plans. The challenge is to bring those plans together, and the key agencies with the best opportunity to maximise local buy-in are the democratic local authorities.

We are in deep recession and our businesses are struggling. For some, their very survival is at stake. There are many trends in our globalised economy that are damaging to our town and city centres, and so we must imagine a potentially different high street of the future. We must recognise the significant challenges that have undermined the high street in the past and ensure that we put vibrancy back at the heart of our community.

We also need to ensure that there is no more self-inflicted damage of the kind that Belfast has suffered from for the past year. The last thing that our businesspeople need is

a campaign of civil disobedience, and we do not need a Minister for mayhem. Putting an end to that self-inflicted damage is very much in the hands of the Members of the House. Given the perilous state of some of our high streets and town centres, we must recognise the severe damage that that causes and ensure that it does not happen again.

It is also in our hands to agree that there is a problem and to do something about it. If there were a thermometer — a way of measuring the quality of a community — it would be in the vibrancy, or not, of a city, town or village centre. All of us in this Chamber know the poor state of many of our towns. The statistics show it, too: one in four of our shops is empty, which is twice the UK average. That single statistic shows that we must do something urgently and differently from what we have been doing up to this point.

We need to listen to the business community's anxieties around business rates, planning, transport and car parking charges because it is telling us not just that the problem is bad, but that it is going to get worse unless something is done urgently. It is predicting that many hundreds of high street businesses —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that I must interrupt the Member.

Mr McKinney: — will close in the future if something is not done. That, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, is a warning that we cannot ignore. We must respond to that warning not with short-term fixes —

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

Mr McKinney: — but with a real strategic prosperous vision.

Mr Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I apologise for earlier omitting to declare an interest as a recipient of small business rate relief.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The Member has that on the record.

Mr Allister: It is traditional, when one follows a maiden speech, to commend the person who made it. Mr McKinney made his points very ably. I was a little surprised that he appeared to cross the conventional boundary of maiden speeches by being controversial, with unnecessary comments about civil disobedience. Those were surprising comments, given that it was the SDLP that introduced us to the politics of civil disobedience. I found that a little bit surprising. That apart, I commend him on his speech.

I want to focus on the outworkings of the public realm schemes in some of our town centres and to place a particular topical focus on a difficulty that has emerged in the town at the heart of my constituency. I speak of Ballymena, where we have a very welcome £4 million scheme, but which has a very unwelcome dimension: an unnecessary attempt to steamroller a portion of it on the trading centre of Ballymoney Street without adequate consultation with the traders.

It seems that, too often, we hand these matters over to consultants who have all sorts of preconceived ideas and, through some wonderful desktop compositions, come up with aesthetically very pleasing and presentable proposals, but which, at times, are utterly bereft of the most basic component of common sense. We have a classic illustration of that in Ballymena, where the traders of Ballymoney Street are, rightly, up in arms because

they will be robbed of essential on-street parking, with the removal down one side of the street of on-street parking in its entirety. What does it mean for traders in Ballymoney Street, who are already competing with out-of-town traders with free car parking, if we put extra hurdles in the pathway of a person who wants to shop in the town but cannot stop there? I think that I know where he will stop; he will go to the free car park, out of town.

When you look at some of the businesses in Ballymoney Street in Ballymena, you see that on-street parking is not a luxury; it is vital to their operation. Consider one of the largest traders, Moore Electrics, which runs a very big repair operation for appliances. People stop outside or opposite the shop to carry in the appliance that needs repaired or pick up an appliance that has been repaired. However, those marvellous consultants, to whom we are paying endless amounts of money, have come up with a scheme under which you will not be able to do that. How is that business going to survive if people cannot carry the appliance that needs to be repaired into the shop? They will simply go somewhere else because they will certainly not carry the appliance from 300 metres or 500 metres away, where there may be a static car park.

To put the money to good use, we need to ensure that proposals are not just aesthetically pleasing but compatible with common sense. I trust that the scheme in Ballymena will be revised to make it common sense compatible and that we will have something that works, not something that drives those who work in shops out of work, because that is the way in which we are headed.

Mr McNarry: It has often been said that we are a nation of shopkeepers. One prominent offspring of a shopkeeper, by the name of Margaret Thatcher, laid claim to that in all that she did to bring that perception home to us all.

One reflects on those days as being perhaps a small journey down memory lane. Sometimes we are reminded by television shows such as the recent 'Mr Selfridge' of what was often described as the joy of shopping or, when I was a young person, trundling down to the shop for a bottle of milk, a loaf or vegetables. People looked forward to shopping itself, because, for many, it was nearly a daily experience, a way of finding out what was going on in the community and of keeping friends. In those days, you could generally leave your house unsecured, in the knowledge that it would be safe when you returned, so things have changed.

Like education, and the flaw that there is in education, we will ignore choice as an option at our peril. I commend those who brought before the House the motion and the amendment, because modern shoppers are key to all the plans. They are voting with their feet and going to shopping centres and places that are open 24 hours a day to do a main, weekly shop. In many cases, they are also going for value for money, which they do not often see on the high street. We have to accept that that is the public's thinking.

I was in the retail business for 40 years. The lesson for all retailers is to chase the market. If the market is not there, you are not a retailer. Therefore, retailers have had hard times in towns and cities.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: I will.

Mr Clarke: I accept the Member's remarks. However, retailers and towns have been disadvantaged, because rates in out-of-town shopping centres are not equivalent to those in town centres. The size of out-of-town shopping centres and the fact that their costs are lower means that they can sell more products and be more profitable than retailers in towns. Although we draw comparisons between the two sectors, and I understand why the Member said that the trade goes there, they are not the same.

1.00 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McNarry: Thank you for that. I was actually coming to that point. The Member makes a very valid point. I was saying that retailers in towns and cities have had hard times due to rates and parking, issues into which Mr Allister and others have ventured. Particular issues are footfall and the key to making shopping an attraction, not a chore. Each Member of the House would say, "Please shop locally". I tell people to shop in my local village of Ballygowan and to go down to Comber and Newtownards. In the main, society does not attract them to do that. That is the way it is. I have got to say — I am sure that some Member have done so, and I have missed it — that, above all else, we must not forget the staff and workers in those shops. We must not forget the hours that they work and the security of their jobs. All those things are important and are intertwined.

In conclusion, I want to say that I was glad to see Member McKinney make his maiden speech. I am sure that he is pleased that it is over. At times, I just wonder what on earth UTV is doing to us in this place. It seems to be like a training option for the Assembly. What next? Will we have Dame Purdy and Lord Ken elevated to the House of Lords to haunt us from another place? Nevertheless, I am pleased that he has found his forte now. I take this opportunity to welcome him. I am sure that he will be a good and honourable Member of the House like all the other Members from his party.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I thank the Members who brought the motion to the Chamber. I have listened with interest to all the speakers in the debate. I would like to thank them for their contributions. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion as amended as I am broadly supportive of its aims. It also provides an opportunity to outline the significant efforts that my Department is making to support retailers in these difficult times. A number of contributions were made during the debate, and I will respond to them in due course.

As Minister for Social Development, I have responsibility for urban regeneration in addition to community development, housing, social security benefits, pensions and child maintenance. That responsibility for urban regeneration relates to urban centres with populations of over 4,500 residents. Smaller settlements fall within the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The motion highlights the difficulties that are faced by small businesses, particularly those in the retail sector. I will focus my comments on that group.

The recession, coupled with changes in consumer spending patterns and behaviours, has had considerable impact on the economic performance of town and

city centres across the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, the experiences of town and city centres and arterial routes over recent years has been similar to those elsewhere: shopper numbers are down, and shop unit vacancy rates in Northern Ireland have risen to the highest in the United Kingdom. My Department has been at the forefront in supporting retailers through a range of activities to help reverse the economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do so without the support of government. In taking forward the regeneration activities outlined in our corporate business plan, we have also taken regard of the Executive's commitments in the Programme for Government and to a number of related strategies, including the regional development strategy and the economic strategy. My Department has committed considerable resources in carrying out those activities in Northern Ireland. We have invested some £100 million on urban development grants, comprehensive development schemes and public realm improvements over the past five years. Despite that level of investment, my Department is well aware of the continuing problems that face our town and city centres. However, we must acknowledge that those problems are not only the consequence of the financial recession but are being caused primarily by the changes in consumer spending patterns.

Following the publication of the Portas review, which focused on the problems faced by high streets in England, I initiated a task force, comprising departmental officials, to review the Northern Ireland position. Specifically, the task force's remit was to review the support that the Department for Social Development currently provides to regenerate city and town centres; to consider whether that might be further strengthened in light of the recommendations emanating from the review; to consider the proposals being put forward by representative organisations; and to ascertain the views of local traders and high street businesses across the cities and towns of Northern Ireland. The task force consulted a range of stakeholders and the Departments most closely involved with city and town centre issues. In addition, the task force held 29 high street meetings in cities and towns to hear directly the views of high street traders and other parties on the issues affecting them. Approximately 350 individuals attended the high street meetings, representing a wide range of town centre businesses and representatives of local government.

The main issues identified by the task force fall into two broad categories: those that were articulated by the representative bodies and those that were voiced at the public meetings. As you can imagine, there was a significant overlap. A number of recurring themes were raised by the stakeholder bodies, namely town centre management; business improvement districts; planning; access to town centres; vacancy rates; town centre living; commercial rates; town centre performance indicators; and joined-up government.

Three issues emerged as the top concerns of traders across Northern Ireland because of their perceived impact: car parking charges and enforcement; non-domestic property rates; and competition created by the expansion of out-of-centre retail development across Northern Ireland. Responsibility for those three issues quite clearly falls to other Departments, but they illustrate the requirement for the cooperation across a number of

Departments that the motion seeks. That is why I have indicated my broad support for it.

It is also why I took the findings of the high street task force report to the Executive's subcommittee on the economy. That was part of a broader discussion of the issues facing our high streets. The task force recognised that the economic downturn that began in 2008 had exacerbated and accelerated the problems besetting high streets but had not been the cause. The rise of internet shopping and out-of-town shopping centres has changed the face of UK retail for ever. The combined impact of technology and the economy on consumer needs and wants has created an urgent need to radically rethink how we regenerate and revitalise our high streets. The strategic challenge for central and local government is how to be more innovative in assisting the diversification of our high street from predominately retail-centric locations to multifunctional social centres, not simply competitors for the same consumers.

I turn to the issues that fall under my remit. DSD's current regeneration policies and activities were welcomed and endorsed at the high street meetings. They included city and town centre master planning — I am pleased to see that the amendment to the motion acknowledges the importance of having those plans in place — urban development grants; acquisition of sites for development opportunities; and public realm improvements. However, it was recognised that the current constraints on public and private funding meant that the implementation of those policies has slowed down, owing to a more cautious approach by developers. It was also recognised at the meetings that strengthening DSD's existing regeneration policies, improving the management of city and town centres, better promotion or marketing of city and town centres and encouraging town centre residential living could make an important contribution to sustaining and improving the performance of our high streets. However, I must stress that there is a clear message in the report that the increase in internet shopping and out-of-town shopping centres has changed the face of retail for ever, and we need to be more radical in our approach. The long-term strategic challenge is how we move from a predominantly retail approach to one that develops these places as multifunctional. We have outlined how we will take that forward, and I will address that in a few moments.

Having considered the issues raised, the task force has made recommendations for DSD, all of which I have considered and accepted. Since the publication of the report, good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations. A significant number of public realm and revitalisation and restore schemes have been completed or are in progress. Development briefs continue to be brought to the market and urban development grants provided to stimulate private sector investment. Efforts are also being made to support traders through the introduction of legislation on pavement cafes and street trading, and legislation to facilitate the establishment of business improvement districts has received Royal Assent. Regulations have been consulted on, and I have recently announced the award of a contract to provide expertise to support the establishment of pilot BIDs.

In an effort to broaden the role and function of town and city centres, I will also review the Living over the Shop scheme with a view to developing a new scheme

to encourage people to live in town centres. I will also bring forward proposals to the Executive on a policy for community asset transfer. That has the potential to stimulate the diversification of services on offer in city and town centres and bring vacant buildings back into use. My Department has recognised those broader issues formally, and, in our recently published urban regeneration and community development policy framework, we have made the competitiveness of our town and city centres a core policy objective. The policy framework will guide DSD interventions in urban regeneration until 2015 and, thereafter, local government, which will have regeneration powers and budgets conferred on it. In the future, I expect that community planning will provide the vehicle for greater coordination on these issues.

In drafting the policy framework, we took account of evidence that stated that our towns and cities are not as competitive as their national or European counterparts. Urban regeneration has a critical role to play to ensure that our towns and cities catch up and do better. We need to ensure that our towns and cities support and contribute to overall economic and social development, and, to flourish, they require quality infrastructure and a sustainable and accessible transport system as well as the ability to attract and retain new and existing businesses and provide people with access to jobs and accommodation. Facilitating and incentivising investment in urban centres is vital. In driving forward our framework objective to strengthen the competitiveness of our towns and cities, we recognise that we must be more innovative.

I will pick up on a number of points that were raised by Members. Judith Cochrane spoke about the need for an interdepartmental group. The issues that traders are raising have been raised at the Executive subcommittee on the economy. In future, when this comes around with the councils, community planning will provide that very mechanism. She spoke of the need for a joined-up approach, but DSD's promotion of master plans provides that and a holistic approach to the regeneration of town centres.

Mr Allister referred to the issues in Ballymoney Street in Ballymena. I will bring him up to date on the situation: parking spaces in that area are being looked at. In fact, my staff are already working on the issues that were raised by traders, which shows the importance of engagement and consultation.

Dominic Bradley spoke of the Executive being the appropriate forum for coordinating departmental activities. I agree that there is no need to create another forum because the forum is already there. I was disappointed by Mr Bradley's rather nasty comment in his contribution: I stand four-square behind all that my colleague Nigel Dodds said at the event on Saturday, fully behind what Arlene Foster said yesterday and behind what my colleagues William Humphrey and Nigel Dodds said before the event on Saturday. I do not welcome advice from a party that campaigned for the release of Marian Price and Gerry McGeough, named a playground in Newry, which the Member mentioned, after a terrorist, said sorry for doing it but will not do anything to put it right. It is not exactly the party to give advice to anybody on anything.

Alex Maskey said that it was timely to look at existing plans in this context. The Department will work with the new council structures to ensure that town centre work

continues seamlessly; there has to be a seamless transfer of powers to councils.

1.15 pm

Fra McCann spoke about the Committee for Social Development's report on town centres, rightly so. The recommendations, which were accepted by the Department, helped to inform the development of the new policy framework and the existing programme. I assure him that that was very much in our thinking.

People want a sense of community back, as Fearghal McKinney said. That is why DSD not only supports retailers but advocates greater diversification in town centres. He said that people wanted more than fresh paint and hanging baskets: that is why they are getting a lot more than fresh paint and hanging baskets. That is why we have invested so many millions in town centre regeneration and master planning.

That, I think, covers most of the issues. On just one brief point: David McNarry spoke about the need to increase footfall; that is absolutely essential for businesses. Public realm schemes have been successful in doing so. Newcastle is an oft-quoted example, where a 300% increase in footfall was produced. I see that the Member is nodding, and he is right about the fact that the approaches that my Department has been taking forward work.

Finally, as regards rates, the small business rate relief scheme was mentioned. Almost 25,000 non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland now benefit from a discount of at least 20% through the scheme. It will provide over £60 million in rates relief to business ratepayers during its lifetime, along with the rating of empty non-domestic properties and other initiatives taken forward by my party colleague in the Department of Finance and Personnel.

In closing, I thank those who have taken part in the debate, and I hope that it has been useful in underlining my Department's commitment to the retail sector and to town and city centres in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat: It is my pleasure to wind on the debate. It is not the first time that I have had such a task; over the years, we have had several debates on the subject. Hopefully, after today, we will get some results.

The motion refers to urban towns and villages. The debate has widened that out to include all towns and villages. I hope that that is accepted by the proposer, because the problems in Kilrea are no different from those in Killinchy, Swatragh or Saintfield, and I am sure that the Minister will accept that.

The amendment to the motion was proposed by my colleague Dominic Bradley, who has incurred the wrath of a few people because he referred to the Minister's extra-curricular activities. I will not get involved in that, but I respectfully suggest that the public, who may watch the debate, are far happier when we are at our work in here representing the people of Northern Ireland, particularly those who happen to own small or medium-sized businesses that are struggling for survival. It is sobering to remember that 80% of employment is generated by that sector. So, it is a serious business.

Dominic went on to say that this was a "cross-curricular" activity, if I may use that term again, involving several Departments. The Executive need to look, perhaps, at

the ability to develop cross-departmental issues. The Department for Social Development certainly has a proud history of regeneration over many years. I remind Members that my party held that Ministry for several of the years during which the country had to be rebuilt and restored.

Paula Bradley, as she always does, made constructive contributions. The only little thing with which I would take issue is that the internet is not, necessarily, just for big business. Our smaller businesses need to be advised on how they, too, can take up and benefit from the internet. I am really not taking issue with Paula at all, but we need to get across the message that the internet, if we use it, does not have to destroy our towns and villages.

Alex Maskey is not here. He needed some clarification, but, at the end of the day, I think that he was happy to support the amendment, particularly the issues that confront us in relation to the reform of public administration.

Michael Copeland had so many relations involved in the retail trade that I lost count. I am sorry to hear that only one of them is left and that their business is under threat. I am sure that many other traders will identify with that.

Trevor Clarke had some constructive points to make. However, I was a bit confused: he supports Junction One, but, at the same time, he takes issue with out-of-town shopping centres. Perhaps an out-of-town shopping centre is all right in your own patch but not anywhere else. I am sure that Trevor will want to clarify that.

Mr Clarke: I am happy to clarify that. I support Junction One, but the point that I was trying to make is that every place should have an equal playing field. It follows on from David McNarry's point that, if you want out-of-town shopping centres, that is fine, but DRD should do its bit with free car parking and rates should be aligned so that the two types of business can compete on an even playing field.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dallat: I am delighted that I got that extra minute out of that.

I do not take issue with that and I do not want to confuse or cause any more controversy, but someone needs to talk to Jeffrey Donaldson about the John Lewis out-of-town shopping centre at Sprucefield. That is a major issue and not just here in Northern Ireland. Reference was made to England, and we could go across the Atlantic to America: where out-of-town shopping centres develop uncontrolled, that is the death knell of our towns.

Fra McCann made some interesting points and brought us back to a 2007 Assembly report. He was right to do so. Fearghal McKinney made his maiden speech, and I am sure that you would all agree that it was up to the standard that we would expect from Fearghal. It was nice that he got compliments from Jim Allister, who has also left us at this stage. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, it was David McNarry; I apologise for that.

All in all, it was a good debate. We should not merely take note of it but ensure that some of the excellent contributions that all the political parties made are put into action. Perhaps, then, those issues about rates, car

parking and all the other things that have been affecting our town centres can be addressed.

In my final five or 10 seconds, I encourage young people in particular to consider going into business because new ideas and new thoughts will motivate new types of business and regenerate our town centres and villages.

Mr Dickson: Let me say a word of thanks to all who contributed to the debate. We will not oppose the amendment. Whether we believe in an overarching strategy for town centres or think that the Minister for Social Development and the Executive should work their way through the issues, the difference is not sufficient to divide the House on. A very clear message has come from the Chamber today: support for our town centres, whether the strategy should be overarching or the Executive should get in total control of this. I recognise the work that the Minister for Social Development and his predecessors have done on these issues, but there is also recognition that that Minister on his own cannot address it. Other people need to get involved and need to use their Department and their influence in these matters as well.

The functions relating to the strategic development of town and city centres are dispersed across Departments. Whether we have, as I said, an overarching strategy that brings together relevant Ministers or the Executive set it on the agenda and deal with it through key players in retail and town centre management, we need to ensure that we have effective coordination. I think that that signal has come very clearly from around the Chamber.

Specific areas were referred to that I will highlight. Reference was made to transport. Local authorities, not in Northern Ireland but in England and Wales, have much more input into transport planning, with statutory rights and, indeed, duties to contribute to local area transport plans. That has been omitted from the relevant transport Acts in Northern Ireland. As a former member of the Regional Development Committee, I know that good focus has been placed on the need for a joined-up approach in the coordination of transport across education and health, and a pilot scheme is currently running in the Dungannon area. Nevertheless, Transport NI now needs to look at a far more coordinated approach to transport both in and out of our town and city centres so that we can deal with bus routes, stops near local amenities, cycle lanes, storage, parking and pedestrian facilities. All those issues and factors are essential to vibrant town and city centres. There are deficiencies in strategic transport planning. Transport NI needs more transport planners, and if and when those people are recruited, the focus must be on working with the new local authorities to deliver and put in place solutions that will work for town centres.

The Minister referred to housing and specifically to how housing development and accommodation could be developed in our town centres. In fact, I raised this matter in a question to the Minister last week. Work is ongoing, and valuable work needs to be done to help us use surplus space in town centres and as part of the regeneration effort there. If people live in a town centre, they may wish to work there and they may wish to buy a cup of coffee, shop and do other recreational activities there. If that policy was genuinely to be revitalised, key issues in resolving the problem of accommodation will need to be developed. The Minister has recognised that.

Perhaps more important than all of that is how we deal with town centres as shared spaces. They should and must be shared spaces for all residents of Northern Ireland, not just for those from a particular community that may lay claim to that town. They cannot be the exclusive realm of one community. In practice, however, violence and intimidation over many years has prevented us from translating the principle of equality of access to public services into genuine sharing. We must break the pattern of choice that is determined by fear and intimidation by actively fostering shared and genuinely shared neighbourhoods, workplaces and public amenities, meeting places where people can come to socialise and interact in freedom without fear of intimidation. Creating shared and open spaces that are welcoming to all of us is essential to the development and redevelopment of our town centres.

In 2010, a Life and Times survey found that 54% of people did not believe that our town centres were safe or welcoming places for people from all walks of life. That perhaps demonstrates some of the scale of the challenge. There is the downturn in retail business, the change to internet shopping and all the other difficulties that are piled on us because of an economic recession — and then we in Northern Ireland add a sectarian dimension to it. We need that cross-departmental action and cooperation if we are genuinely to deal with these issues and bring life back to our town centres.

The DRD, the DSD and the DOE need to bring forward new procedures to ensure that regional planning policies and strategic and local area plans take full account of access and accessibility to shared resources in our towns and villages. We believe that the DOE, in order to follow best practice in the design of urban environment and maximise cross-community mixing, should develop a policy planning statement on the matter. The DSD should develop measures to assess the use of public space and report to the Assembly on an annual basis on how it is achieving the sharing of public space.

The management of public thoroughfares is also a key issue. Why, if you came from one community or another, would you wish to use a main thoroughfare that takes you to one of our towns across Northern Ireland to be confronted by a mile-long stretch of road with sectarian flags and graffiti littering the area? That is not a "Welcome" sign to any town or village in Northern Ireland.

In short, we believe that many good initiatives are going on across Northern Ireland, and I, too, want to pay tribute to the Minister, particularly for the work that has been completed in my town, Carrickfergus.

I have been a member of that local authority for so long that I can even remember the previous public realm scheme more than 30 years ago, which had a major impact on the town. However, so did the Troubles, a lot of the graffiti, and the upsets that we have seen recently.

1.30 pm

I genuinely welcome the investment that the Minister has made and the amount of money that has been spent in developing the infrastructure of our town centres. The knock-on effect of that is that we have seen improved electricity supplies and drainage. We have even seen improvement in broadband for businesses in the town centre because the utilities took that opportunity when

the street was dug up and re-paved. There are genuine benefits but more can be derived from good cooperation among Departments. Above all, whether through an overarching strategy or the involvement of the Executive, we need to ensure that our town centres are vibrant, deliver for people, are places that people want to go to, and that they are shared spaces.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the ongoing pressures on small businesses, in particular, those in the retail sector; notes the current and forthcoming policies and programmes in relation to business rates, planning, business improvement districts, public transport, the development of shared space and urban regeneration; further notes that the majority of local authorities have extensive town centre plans; and calls on the Minister for Social Development and the Executive to enable these plans by utilising all the funding mechanisms at their disposal.

Car Parking Companies

Mr Principal 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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Frew: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the practices of some car parking companies and how they operate; questions the adequacy of signage both on parking times and penalties, as well as the quantum, nature, content and design of penalty demands, the threat of legal action and the absence of appeals mechanisms; believes that we need a more robust code of practice for enforcement and more effective regulation by the British Parking Association; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to meet with the Secretary of State for Transport to outline these concerns.

I propose the motion because it is an issue that concerns me greatly. I have dealt with a number of constituency matters and constituents on this issue over the past number of months and years. It grieves me that we seem to be treated differently in this part of the UK compared with the other regions, particularly England and Wales. I am concerned about the practices of some car parking companies. I am concerned about the adequacy of the signage that they use to display parking times and penalties, as well as the quantum of fines and penalties that they can receive, the nature and content of codes of practice, and, of course, the absence of an appeals mechanism here in Northern Ireland.

I am not against the regulation of car parks. It is good and proper that we have regulated car parks so that no one gets a free ride or tries to run over the wishes of shoppers and retailers in our towns. It is proper that we have strict guidelines and rules, and that we try to discipline or at least educate drivers in respect of how they park. I am not here to defend people who park badly, break the rules and are just ignorant and arrogant in their methods and practices when using car parks. Those people block thoroughfares and bung up our town centres and retail parks. It is vital that we have smooth running and traffic management so that our towns tick over nicely. The one thing that will hurt our town centres and retail parks most is if people do not want to travel and park there because of the inconsiderate practices of other drivers. However, it is also true to say that people are frightened to use parking spaces in case they do not know the full rules and are not aware of how to park, where they can park, and how long they can park for. The retailers and the parking companies that they employ and that are contracted to do the job need to ensure that they make people aware. It is fair to say:

“Everyone should benefit from good parking management; Everyone should know the rules and how to park compliantly; Everyone who undertakes parking enforcement should be appropriately qualified and properly regulated; ... Proper and effective parking and traffic management is essential to support sustainable growth in our high streets; Every car park should be a safer car park; Every car park should be properly serviced and maintained; Every parking and

traffic Order should be easy to understand and simple to implement”.

That is from the British Parking Association's 'Master Plan for Parking 2013-14'. There has been a failure to put it into practice. I am sure that many MLAs have seen that failure at first hand at constituency level.

I want to discuss and bring to the fore for the Minister and other Members a couple of case studies. The first is that of a husband who went shopping for his wife and four children. We can all be very forgetful as husbands. If we go with a list, we try to get exactly everything that is on it. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, you will know that it takes a lot of time and hard work to concentrate and get everything on the list. If we cannot find something on the shelves that is on the list, it is not very often that we will use our common sense to pick another brand. Therefore, you phone your wife to find out what else will be acceptable. It takes time to shop. One constituent took one hour and 13 minutes to do a shop for his wife. She, of course, had the four babies with her. He could park there for only an hour, and he was totally unaware of that. As a result, this gentleman found out a couple of weeks later that he was liable for a fine of £150. If he paid it within 14 days, it would be only £75.

If you ask me, it is atrocious that someone could be liable for that amount of fine for a 13-minute breach of the conditions. It is fair to say that, when you park in a privately owned car park, you are entering into a contract. Very rarely do constituents realise the contract that they are in, and this man was penalised £75 if he paid within 14 days or £150 if he did not pay within 14 days. I was able to get on to the company to harass it and harass it some more. Meanwhile, the constituent was getting letters threatening him that he would be taken to court, that he would receive a black mark and that he would not be able to get credit if he did not pay. The letters were legalistic, and those threatening letters stopped only after about six months. They stopped out of the blue, not because of some technicality or some loophole that I had found in legislation but because the company had had enough and did not want bad attention in the media. The company waived the fee.

I have another case study. Patrons drive into a retail park and go into one of the premises. They come back out and fill their boot, and they then decide that they have a message to do a couple of yards up the street. They walk out of the car park, and, as they do so, the man who is enforcing and in charge of monitoring the car park lets them walk by without telling them or warning that, if they walk out of the premises and out of the car park, they will be liable for a fine. Those people walked out to pick up, I think, tickets for a theatre show and came back to see that they had been fined £100. It is incredible that, in this day and age, that can happen. When you try to fight for them, it is the same story. Those people will be bombarded with threatening enforcement letters, saying that the company can get their details from the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA), which is quite right, and that they could be blacklisted, which could mean that they cannot get credit. They will also be threatened with court action. Again, you spend six months writing to those car parking companies, and then, at the end of it, they simply waive the payment and stop, not because you have done something right or been smart about it, but because they have just given up trying to get the money. It has caused

so much heartache to constituents who have had to go through that. Sometimes those people are pensioners or are unemployed and do not have the money to fight big companies and take them to court. They fear being taken to court themselves.

We need adequate signage that will make people aware of what they are actually getting into. When you have all that, and you go down the road of trying to appeal or trying to get a fine reduced or waived, you will find that, in Northern Ireland, we do not have a right of appeal as England and Wales do. I was in correspondence with the previous Minister of the Environment on this issue, and I know that he was very sympathetic to my cause. The current Minister should keep pressure on the Secretary of State for Transport and find a way, by whatever means, to make sure that we have an appeals structure in Northern Ireland that is fit for purpose, that is the same as that in England and Wales and that will treat our constituents, shoppers and retailers with fairness.

The appeals mechanism in England costs the car parking companies £29 every time somebody takes a case to appeal. That in itself will hopefully focus the minds of those companies to, at least, have a human face on them when dealing with the population and not hide behind threatening letters.

I am running out of time but I hope that I will have the support of the House in trying to get something better for the constituents of Northern Ireland and for them to be treated with the same respect, with the same rules and regulations, as everyone in England and Wales. I hope that Scotland will follow suit and will be listening to this debate also.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá, agus ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin seo. I rise to speak in favour of the motion. I want to thank those who put the pack together for the debate. To be honest, until I started to read up on it, I did not realise that this was a problem in some parts of the North, and it is becoming more and more prevalent. I am broadly supportive of the motion and its highlighting of the problems. I share the sentiment that the current system is open to abuse by some elements of the private parking industry.

I want to use a couple of examples. I was talking to one of my colleagues, who told us that she dealt with a case in Newry, where a gentleman parked outside a well-known clothes shop in Newry and went in. I will not mention the shop. As you do in that type of shop, you shop around the racks; you may get a bargain or some designer gear there. It is a very well-renowned shop in Newry. The key element was that, when the man and his wife left the shop, there was a ticket for a £100 fine sitting on his car. The man said that he could not have been looking around the shop for more than 10 or 15 minutes. When he enquired about it, the issue was that the company could not rescind the ticket there and then. He had an opportunity to write in relation to it, but, basically, he was told that he needed a receipt from the shop to overturn the ticket. Also, when one of my colleagues phoned up to intervene on his behalf, the company said that it did not deal with public representatives. Obviously, a £100 fine in any circumstances — especially given today's climate — is very severe.

The widespread and growing use of private companies to enforce parking restrictions on private land has, unfortunately, given rise to increasing instances of abuse and unfair practice. Although, in many cases, the landowners and parking companies operate reasonable practices to deal with a legitimate issue, undoubtedly there are some less scrupulous elements within the industry who seek to take advantage of circumstances simply to turn a profit. It goes without saying that stern condemnation should be placed at the door of any company that would seek to operate in any way that would confuse, mislead or, indeed, intimidate members of the public.

1.45 pm

I accept that a greater degree of regulation is perhaps necessary to ensure that adequate signage is on display in all such parking areas and facilities so as to leave members of the public in no doubt as to the parking policy in operation on that site. I refer Members to the Armagh city end of the district. Since reading up on the motion, I have just noticed, in one area of Armagh city, a car park attendant walking around in a fluorescent jacket. I looked at what kind of signage there was and had a chat with the person to see exactly what the story was. There is a sign that says, "parking for two hours only", but there is no talk about clamping, fines or anything else. The proposer of the motion mentioned that there needs to be better regulation and signage. I certainly support him in that. Further, I suggest that much more needs to be done to educate drivers as to the precise extent of their rights in disputes arising from such matters and to ensure proper access to an accountable and transparent —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that although we probably have a lot of examples of constituents coming to us, so many shoppers and constituents simply pay the fine and do not try to fight it or appeal? They simply pay it because they are scared not to. That builds up resentment and could hurt retailers and town centres.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Boylan: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

I agree with the Member and thank him for his intervention. When I started to look into the matter, I realised that it is becoming more and more prevalent. It does affect the consumer and is something that we need to look at. Maybe the Minister can indicate some way forward on this.

Like I say, we need to ensure proper access to an accountable and transparent appeals process. In the meantime, the Department and the statutory agencies should be doing more to identify the practitioners of underhand or intimidatory tactics, which in some cases amount to little more than extortion. With that, I support the motion.

Mr P Ramsey: On behalf of the SDLP, I welcome the motion and will certainly be supporting it. We can all understand the testimonies and examples that Paul has given, because we have all heard them in our own constituencies.

As recently as May, the SDLP, through its Environment Minister, Alex Attwood, pledged to put a stop to this and to protect the motorist from being hounded by private

companies demanding, as both Members who have spoken have said, punitive parking fees of up to — as Paul said, in particular — £140 for literally 10 minutes. That is very punitive. He has confronted those firms and challenged them. However, as the Member said, we need tougher guidelines and regulations and a code of conduct, which I will reference later. Furious drivers are sharing their stories of being hounded by private companies. My constituency in Derry is no different, with problems in two particular areas; not so much within the city centre as we commonly would know it but at Crescent Link and the out-of-town shopping centre at Lisnagelvin. Neighbours of mine have come in, nearly in tears, with these tickets demanding money. I agree with the Member; people panic and genuinely believe that this is, in some way, a public agency enforcing a penalty on them. Clearly, it is not. It is those English companies coming here, which have been licensed as well, may I add.

There is a need to get a handle on what is going wrong. Cathal was right about the underhand and intimidatory methodology used by these companies. They think that they can get away with it, but they should not be getting away with it. The SDLP has been pushing for this through our Minister. I am sure that our own Mark, coming into office, will reflect on today's debate and bring forward a much stronger code of conduct that will put disciplinary action on those companies that are abusing this. There is a need for clearer guidelines, information campaigns and notices advising drivers of their rights, aimed at helping those who receive threatening letters, particularly on private land. Motorists need to be reassured that anyone accessing the data is stringently assessed by DVA to ensure that it is necessary and proportionate.

Although the information is processed in Northern Ireland, all the moneys raised to date — last year, it was almost £50,000 — go straight to Westminster's Department for Transport, via the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea. Our Minister, Mark Durkan, will need to make a strong case, as Alex Attwood previously did. He met his London counterpart, as Paul Frew has asked our present Minister to do, and asked for the DVA's work to be devolved to Northern Ireland. That will help not only to protect the motorists using the car parks but to protect the jobs that are under threat of being redirected out of Northern Ireland.

The amount of stress, anger and frustration felt by young drivers, married women with children and older people is very worrying, and they believe that the private companies that are coming into Northern Ireland are getting away with it. A line has to be drawn today. The private companies have not come across very well in the media. I do not think that there is a local newspaper in Northern Ireland that has not covered a story about the outrageous fees that people are being asked to pay. Unfortunately, as Members said, the fact that people are paying those fees is worse again. If you pay your £100 within 14 days, it is reduced to £50, and a lot of nonsense comes with that. We should give a clear, united message to those companies and site owners. In the context of my constituency, the shopping centre owners in Crescent Link and Lisnagelvin should take greater control of the companies that they have asked to manage the sites.

I take the point that we have to be mindful that there is a need for effective traffic management in small car parks in

city centres that are being managed by private companies. Those car parks need a turnover, but we cannot have people getting a £130 or £140 fine because they are parked on a line in a car park. That is also happening, and it is not because people are overstaying their welcome by one or two hours. It is being done in circumstances in which people are being given fixed penalties for the most minor offences.

The SDLP supports the motion, and we look forward to our Minister bringing forward clear guidelines, definitions and a code of conduct.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Members for tabling the motion. There is an interesting aspect because it is not only about the implementation of charges but the lack of an appeal mechanism in Northern Ireland. One thing that appears to be missing with the people who enforce the charges is common sense. Where has all that gone in our society? I am not here to defend those who park illegally and try to trespass on people's ground. In particular, businesses have a right to protect their areas and keep them for their shoppers, but they do not want to put shoppers off. Business is tight enough, and in the previous debate, we heard about how tight the economic situation is in Northern Ireland. To be fair to those businesses, they do not want to put people off, but the issue is how these companies are engaged in traffic enforcement.

My understanding is that there is no criminal law that supports these parking tickets or charges. It is a trespass law and a contract law as opposed to a criminal law. Other Members spoke about a code of conduct, but we do not have a proper appeal mechanism, and we require a proper legislative base. If we had that, everybody in Northern Ireland would be broadly aware of what is required, and people would not be forced into making the rash decision to pay an exorbitant fine. Some of those fines are £150. People should not be forced into paying those exorbitant fines without the proper protection of the law. That is one of the difficulties of this system.

I am not sure that a code of conduct will resolve the matter. We need specific legislation here in Northern Ireland to deal with the system so that we are not relying on contract and trespass law, which is very vague. We should put in place the proper regulations here in Northern Ireland to protect the businesses that own that private property and the consumers who park there. I will be interested to hear from the Minister about how he can deal with that.

I got a bit of information on parking charges issued by private groups from BBC 'Watchdog', which states:

"there is nothing in criminal law to support a penalty or fine for parking on private land ... This isn't a criminal matter despite any impression given to the contrary by the operator."

Unfortunately, as was outlined earlier, not every consumer knows that. They panic and go and pay the fine, which is wrong. Consumers need the protection in law just the same as business owners require it.

I support the motion, as does the Ulster Unionist Party. I will be interested to hear from the Minister and whoever winds on the motion about how they would provide real protection for businesses, property owners and, more importantly, consumers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time is due to begin at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Ms Anna Lo.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr Speaker: We now come to Question Time. We have topical questions first, but, before we come to those, let me say that Members from all sides of the House will know that topical questions have been ongoing for some weeks. We are keeping a watching brief on them. However, I have to say that some Members are lifting questions for oral answer from the Order Paper. They are not their own questions, but they ask them as topical questions. We are keeping a watching brief on that. That needs to stop, and I assure the House that that is something that we are watching very carefully.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On your point about Members lifting questions and using them for the unnotified question, is it your intention to make representation to the Committee on Procedures to have that procedure put in reverse so that it cannot happen or will be minimised?

Mr Speaker: First of all, Lord Morrow, there should be no points of order during Question Time. Briefly, however, to answer the Member's question, we are watching a number of issues in topical questions, and there are a number of suggestions that we will certainly put to the Committee on Procedures to look at for us sooner rather than later.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Bands: Funding

1. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she agrees that there is room to give more assistance to the band movement in Northern Ireland, given that over 30,000 people are involved, they receive annual funding of approximately £200,000, and most bands spend about £20,000 a year on uniforms alone, never mind the equipment, some of which is very expensive, that they have to purchase. (AQT 161/11-15)

I listened to a very interesting article on that this morning. However, hopefully, I am not stepping on the toes of anyone who has tabled a question for oral answer. I could not even tell you what the questions for oral answer are, Minister, so apologies for that.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his very topical question. Funding for marching bands is purely for musical instruments and tuition. There was a public interest test on whether support or moneys should be provided towards uniforms. People could understand the return through musical tuition and purchasing the instruments, but, when it came to the rationale for providing support for uniforms, it did not stack up as well. I appreciate the Member's point, but I certainly have no plans to introduce funding for bands to buy uniforms. I am certainly happy to continue with the purchasing of instruments. The Ulster-Scots bodies do a very good job in tuition, but there are no plans to provide money for uniforms.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that answer. Obviously, the Minister has researched the uniforms issue. Does she agree that bands are one of the key mechanisms for getting people into the music in our culture in Northern Ireland? Although you cannot give money towards uniforms, as you clearly pointed out, can you increase the grant funding for the musical instruments, as they are, unfortunately, getting more and more expensive?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate the Member's concern about the pressures that some of the marching bands face in keeping up with music, uniforms and stuff like that, but I have absolutely no intention of increasing the money that is there. In fact, it is not that I have not got an intention to increase the money; there are bigger demands from other bands, not just marching bands but those that come together to play pop or traditional music. We need to look at that. Certainly, if there is an increased demand and there is evidence of increased demand, I would certainly be happy to review it, but I cannot go beyond that with commitments.

Bands: Cultural Contribution

2. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she recognises the valuable contribution that marching bands make to the cultural expression of the community in Northern Ireland. (AQT 162/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do recognise it, for some bands more than others. In rural areas, in particular, the band is often the hub of the community, and music tuition and musical expertise are passed on from one generation to another. That is valued and recognised, but that does not mean that there will be additional money for bands. If there is bigger demand for the purchase of musical instruments across the board, not just for marching bands, I will be happy to look at it, but I have not seen any particular increase in requests for support. However, they will probably come flooding in after these two very topical questions.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for her answer. My supplementary question ties in with my colleague's question about funding and how we encourage the next generation to participate and improve our marching bands, given that they teach young people about time routine, commitment to organisations and recognising the culture of Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that, in order to encourage the next generation to join our bands, funding is absolutely necessary?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding is necessary, and it is awarded through the Arts Council and the Ulster-Scots Agency. They do an excellent job and have an excellent relationship with a lot of the marching bands, particularly in Protestant, unionist and loyalist communities, and long may that continue. There is no indication that money will be removed from bands, unless they break the law or the conditions of their letter of offer for funding. That is the case for anyone who gets a letter of offer, regardless of what the investment was used for in the first place. I go back to the point that I made to the Member's colleague: if there is an increase, we will be happy to review the situation, but I cannot give a commitment for additional money.

Exploris

3. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will commit herself to working with other Departments to find a long-term solution to sustain Exploris as a regional facility. (AQT 163/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I recognise that there has been a very good campaign to increase public awareness of the situation at Exploris, but let us be frank about this: we cannot have a situation in which people claim that a council-run facility that is currently under threat — a decision has been made to close it, although that has been stayed for two months — is regional, which, I am sure, it is, and expect the Executive to pick up the cost. I am happy to work with colleagues on the issue, but I will not commit myself to funding it. We could end up with a queue, particularly in preparation for RPA, of other facilities that we will be expected to fund as well. That is as much as I can say at this stage.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her response, although I am disappointed by it. What impact will the loss of Exploris have on the provision of leisure activities for families and for tourists who come to Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have absolutely no idea of the impact that it might have. Other than the headlines that we see in the media, we need to see detail. There has been an absence of detail. The campaign has been very effective and has highlighted how people feel about Exploris; I appreciate that. Even if — it is a big “if” — the Executive were to support it, there needs to be a lot more detail coming forward other than headlines. I regret that the Member is disappointed, but any MLA or Minister worth their salt will not be press-ganged into an answer just because a Member has asked a question.

Irish Football Association

4. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the progress of her discussions with the Irish Football Association on overcoming any difficulties that there are with its governance arrangements and articles of association. (AQT 164/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The discussions are ongoing, and I am sure that the Member will appreciate that there is a lot of sensitivity in the matter. I remain confident that we can resolve the outstanding governance issues.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her response. On the other side of the issue, what discussions has her Department had with the European Union to ensure that there will be no blockage to funding from that end?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Again, we have been in Europe, and we will continue to talk to Europe. We are hoping to have an outcome from those ongoing discussions before Christmas. Either way, it is still a very sensitive issue. I have fought the issue on behalf of the IFA in particular but also on behalf of the whole Executive. The state aid issue raises questions for every investment that we have made in the past 10 years, not just in DCAL but across the board. The Member will appreciate and understand that I am robustly defending any challenges on state aid. Needless to say, we are working through it well.

Inland Waterways

5. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether inland waterways could be developed to provide a major leisure and recreational activity resource. (AQT 165/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Inland waterways to that. Waterways Ireland is one of the all-Ireland bodies that my Department has responsibility for. You can see the value of the work that it does, particularly in rural areas. I am also working with some councils to improve some of the waterways within their control. I agree with the Member that inland waterways provide brilliant opportunities not just for tourism but for local leisure. They are the economic driver in some towns and villages.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for her answer. She has touched on my supplementary question. Does the Minister agree that the development of inland waterways, while a great source of leisure and recreational activities, can also act as a catalyst for urban and rural regeneration?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree. I made a statement to the House in July, I think, about some of the events that take place at inland waterways across the island. Those events include festivals and family fun days. Huge numbers attend those events, and they act as economic drivers. Not only are those responsible keen to make sure that they are further developed, but people from other areas visit those festivals in towns and villages to see how they can extract that product for their area. They see the potential and outcome of those events.

Sports Programme

6. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will set a deadline for submitting proposals for the Together: Building a United Community cross-community sports programme, and, if so, has she submitted proposals. (AQT 166/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am working with Executive colleagues on submitting proposals not just to the Together: Building a United Community programme but to Delivering Social Change and others. I may be wrong, but I think that the Member has asked me about this before, particularly in relation to those with disabilities. I am advancing proposals and making access to sports for those with disabilities a priority. There are other proposals, and we are doing good work with Executive colleagues to bring those forward. Deadlines bring a degree of focus, but there is no point in battening down the hatches when we are at a good stage. As the Member will expect, work has started and is progressing, but we are not done yet.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for her answer. Have you engaged with Ulster Rugby in working on your proposals?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I engage with Ulster Rugby and the other governing bodies regularly. The Member may recall that DCAL invested additional money in rugby, soccer and Gaelic games, particularly for their work in promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. That will certainly be a theme in any proposals that I bring forward. Discussions have been ongoing in that vein for some time.

GAA: Proposed Casement Development

7. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given, no doubt, that she supports the principle of transparency and accountability, whether she considers it desirable, if not essential, that the GAA shares with the residents of Mooreland and Owenvarragh in west Belfast its full business plan for the proposed stadium at Casement in order to ensure that the residents know what they might anticipate if the stadium goes ahead. (AQT 167/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The issue has been raised before. I went to a meeting with the residents and, indeed, with his brother and party colleague, at the behest of the MP for West Belfast, Paul Maskey. The residents asked me for the full copy of the outline business case and were advised that they could have the parts that were not commercially sensitive. They accepted that. If the Member is telling me that the situation is otherwise, I am happy to meet him to talk about it.

Mr Attwood: The narrative is very different from my point of view. Setting aside the issue of commercial sensitivity, the residents have such a weight of concerns around the project that they need the fullest possible information. I note the point about the commercial sensitivity of the GAA's business plans, even though, in the view of the residents, that is stretching the point. Do you not agree that it is time for the full plan to be released to the residents?

2.15 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am glad to see that the Member has taken an interest in this. He is bordering on accusing the GAA of misleading the residents, when it has not. The GAA has engaged with the residents, as it has engaged with others, and I have engaged with them. It is rich for anybody to suggest that the residents have been kept in the dark. That is not what the residents say to me at all, and I have met them. Therefore, I wonder about the Member's motives.

Mr Speaker: That ends topical questions. We move on to questions for oral answer.

Ulster-Scots Academy

1. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Ulster-Scots Academy. (AQO 4705/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy (MAGUS) is tasked with progressing the Ulster-Scots Academy approach. In response to comments received during the public consultation, the MAGUS development and research strategy includes a strategic objective to:

"identify, consider and progress options for the creation of a physical ... academy."

A business case, which should be completed by November, is being prepared to examine a shortlist of options and recommend a preferred option, including potential location and premises. It is intended that the academy should link with universities, research institutions, historical and tourism bodies and Ulster-Scots sectoral bodies, including the Ulster-Scots Agency, as well as with the wider community, to ensure the benefits from collaboration and partnership working. Community

involvement and connections with rural areas will also form an important part of the academy's activities. I expect it to provide opportunities to promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion by contributing to personal and community development, enhancing skills and creating employment and new heritage tourism offerings. Following a period of public consultation and after securing the views of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I aim to make an announcement before the summer recess next year.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that education on the Ulster-Scots tradition is beneficial for placing Northern Ireland's history in its proper context for future generations?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree with the Member. I believe that, particularly around development and research, there are massive opportunities not only to talk about the cultural and heritage opportunities for now but to future-proof it. I believe that the Ulster-Scots Agency in particular, working with the Ulster-Scots Community Network and the MAGUS, has huge opportunities to make sure that the product that it offers has better long-lasting potential, particularly for the decades ahead.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answers. Will she please give an update on the development of an Ulster-Scots hub at the Oldpark library site? I have fond memories of borrowing books on many occasions from that site in my youth.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am glad that both the Oldpark library and the Member are still here and thriving. Certainly the Oldpark library — not so much the Member — needs some TLC. I will leave that to you [*Laughter.*] The cultural hub will not be hosted in the Oldpark library, because the Ulster-Scots Agency — the network and others — felt that a city centre location, with a view to having something in a rural area, was better use of public money. I am going to meet Libraries NI, and I have met the Minister for Social Development and others to look at how we can preserve the Oldpark library as part of the footprint for the development of Girdwood.

Rathlin Island

2. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she plans, through her Department's arm's-length bodies, to bring new opportunities to Rathlin Island. (AQO 4706/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He is aware that, last month, my officials visited Rathlin Island and met representatives of those living and working there. A variety of ideas was discussed. The ideas reflected the diverse range of support and programmes offered across the DCAL family. I have subsequently asked Sport NI to assess sporting needs and ways in which to bring more sporting opportunities to that community. I understand that a visit has been arranged for later this month. I am also keen to explore other ways to improve the tourism offering and opportunities for DCAL to enhance the culture, arts and leisure offering on the island.

The Member is also aware that Libraries NI currently provides a door-to-door delivery service on the first Friday of each month, weather permitting. It has 45-plus regular customers who use that facility. Those initial

discussions will be developed, and I intend that DCAL will be represented on the Department for Regional Development's cross-departmental forum responsible for taking forward the Rathlin Island policy and action plan.

Mr McKay: I welcome the Minister's response and the news that she will go to Rathlin Island. She will be very welcome there, as all Ministers are. Are there any themes or areas that islanders can focus on for their own participation as well as promoting the island's tourism opportunities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. In initial discussions, there seemed to be interest in the Líofo programme, access to creative industries and, as I said in my main answer, in increasing physical participation in, maybe, sports. The islanders are proud of and proactive about their heritage and the history of the island, not just those with the Irish language but those with Ulster Scots, as in relation to a previous question. I am keen to make sure that DCAL has a footprint on and investment in the island, but those need to be based on the needs of the islanders and must stack up, as the Member will appreciate.

Mr Campbell: The Minister responded specifically to her party colleague's question regarding Rathlin. In a different context, can she bear in mind what she has said when she is dealing with the island of Rathlin whenever she uses a different, politically charged context talking about matters of North and South within this island?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his consistency. I am not really too sure what he is talking about. I assume he could write it down for me and perhaps be more specific instead of sitting there making silly remarks and silly points.

Innovation Strategy

3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what input her Department had into the draft innovation strategy, (AQO 4707/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. DCAL has been proactively involved in the development of the innovation strategy. That is reflected in the draft strategy's recognition of the important role that the creative industries and the wider creativity agenda can play in driving forward innovation.

The draft strategy, for example, identifies as a key action the development of a creative NI framework to foster and nurture a culture of creativity and design thinking. It also gives commitments to increase the capacity of the creative learning centres as well as to introduce a creative credits voucher.

DCAL also provided one of the evidence packs that were published as part of the consultation on the draft strategy. It outlines the guiding principles and initial actions informing the Department's approach to growing the creative industries, supporting the creative economy and stimulating social innovation.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she expand on where she sees the balance between the work of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in promoting this important sector?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is a very good synergy. What is more, I have taken a lot of advice and listened to a lot of the views and opinions of people in the sector. They are glad to see the two Departments actively promoting economic as well as social and cultural opportunities for the creative industries. The balance is right, it is a good balance, and the lesson that we need to learn is to listen to people. When they have views that will enhance the potential for people to access education, jobs or the economy through the creative industries, our job is to listen. However, this strategy has proved that DETI and DCAL have done just that.

Miss M McIlveen: How did the CAL Committee's inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries shape the Department's submission to the draft innovation strategy? Also, how does the Department plan to monitor the effectiveness of its proposals?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The CAL Committee's report and investigation into the creative industries was broadly welcomed, not just by me but by people in the sector. It will be an integral part of the framework; it has to be. It is very good work. A lot of work was put into it. The sector got very involved with it. It participated in it and felt that some of the views that its members gave were represented in the strategy, and that is good work. Not just that: we need to make sure that the consultation exercise and report are part not only of the framework but of the monitoring and evaluation of anything that we do. The work is too good and it is too good an opportunity to miss if we do not do that. It is also insulting to people who spent an awful lot of time and energy to produce what I think is very good work that we can all use, not only in DCAL and DETI but, certainly, across the Executive.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answers.

Can the Minister outline how her Department's focus on STEAM subjects supports the work that others are taking forward through STEM?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I know that, even just in terms of the question that the Committee Chairperson asked about how it will be brought forward and reviewed, science, technology, engineering and maths are, certainly, crucial to the economy. However, I certainly argue and, I think, the report argues that so, too, are creativity and design skills. Look at the power of the arts and creativity, particularly in industry: it is something we cannot ignore. Let us be honest about it: creative industries include using, in particular, things like phones, iPads, computer generation, graphic design and set design. I could go on. To make sure that what are known now as STEAM subjects have a partnership and relationship with STEM is crucial not just to those who are not involved in STEM subjects but have an opportunity to develop and learn through STEAM.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go nuige seo.

Touching on the Minister's response a wee moment or two ago about taking us into the digital area with phones, apps, iPads and the like, can she indicate whether her Department has, in fact, had any discussions with DETI or DEL, for that matter, to ensure that the innovation strategy

deals with the skills gap in that sector and related sectors, such as the digital apps economy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I like the way he talks about those technical things as though he does not have any of them and still uses a telephone, not a mobile, iPad or any of the rest. He makes a valid point: there is absolutely no point in missing opportunities where you can influence and actually change curricula to make sure that children, young people and people returning to education have the opportunities to be involved in the development of the creative industries. I think that that is happening. From what I have heard, we are not quite there yet, but the discussions have been robust, and they will be fed in. DETI and DCAL are taking forward the innovation strategy, but DEL certainly has a huge role to play in that, as does DE.

Libraries

4. Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what investment and promotion is planned for libraries in the next five years. (AQO 4708/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Libraries has a 2014-15 budget of £34.5 million. Future budgets are, as yet, unknown as they are dependent on the outcome of the next spending review. That budget is used to run 98 libraries and approximately 37 mobile libraries and home call vehicles.

Investment projects over the next few years include £28 million for the e2 project to replace Libraries' computer system; new libraries in Lisnaskea and Kilkeel at a cost of £2.5 million; and £1 million plus of maintenance work that is also scheduled to take place this year.

Libraries promotes events in its buildings through engagement with the press and by the use of social media. It also has promotional partnership arrangements with other organisations, including DARD, to assist rural dwellers, and DEL, around access to benefits and job assistance. Those are just two examples of activities that have been carried out to ensure that the public library service remains at the heart of all our communities.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answer. What confidence can she give the House that rural libraries have a future and that she will protect that future, considering that, with regard to their user numbers, they sometimes outperform urban libraries? Although their numbers are significantly lower, they are a bigger proportion of the local population.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assure the Member that I have made libraries a priority. Indeed, last year, seven libraries were in a precarious and vulnerable situation. One example at the heart of the Member's question is the library at Draperstown where, recently, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I worked with the community. We were involved at the launch, but we certainly worked with the community and came together to look at all the activities that happened in that area through the conduit of the library.

I am aware that the figures are relative. They are not the same. You cannot compare urban areas with rural dwellings; it is like comparing apples with oranges.

2.30 pm

At the same time, a library's survival is down to the many people who use its facilities. The wider the range of facilities and the better those are embedded in the community, the stronger a library's chances of survival. I agree that it is crucial that we try to secure the future of libraries, because they provide valuable public services.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Will the Minister provide an update on the seven libraries originally identified for closure following the Libraries NI review?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, one has already been taken forward. The ones in, I think, Killyleagh and, certainly, Carnlough are progressing well. The remaining four are in Fintona, Kells and Connor, Richhill and Greystone in Antrim. There have been ongoing discussions with Libraries NI about trying to look at different partnerships and different provision in those libraries — some more than others, I have to say. I received representations about Fintona library from my colleague representing West Tyrone. It is crucial that the community come together to look at what libraries can provide and to get behind them to make sure that the service is sustained not just in the here and now but for the future.

Mr McGimpsey: In the Minister's answer, she talked about keeping libraries at the heart of our communities. When she took up office, she was aware that eight libraries had been closed in Belfast, all of which were in disadvantaged communities, including Sandy Row, Andersonstown, Belvoir, Braniel, and so on. Will she look at rebuilding the libraries in those areas and at investing in the service for the communities affected, as she goes forward with her investment strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have to be honest with the Member: I have not looked into reopening those libraries or even building new ones. I do not believe that the decision was the right one. I share the Member's concern, particularly about those deprived areas where there is little opportunity for people to get involved in a service that has no stigma attached to it. You go through a library door, and there is no stigma at all attached to it. The service that people received there was, I believe, second to none; that is what I have been told. However, people in those communities have moved on. Library provision in the context that I spoke about previously has been looked at, but I appreciate that it has not been done in all areas. If there is an increase in demand, I am happy to receive the Member, along with whomever he likes, to argue for that and to hear his case. I cannot give any other commitment above and beyond that.

Mr Lyttle: This morning, an Assembly working group heard that one in four people and as many as two in three in older people in Northern Ireland do not have access to the internet. How is the Minister working with libraries in Northern Ireland to promote better digital inclusion among the population?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member may have heard about the new contract for the libraries' computer system, the E2. That includes using things such as Kindles and iPads, particularly for home visits, to help people who cannot access the library service, either because they have mobility issues or because they look after dependants. It is not just about getting a book; it is about providing

access to broadband. It really is important that people, regardless of their gender, age or where they live, have that access. Broadband and internet use are as vital as ever, particularly in breaking down isolation, improving numeracy and literacy, and looking at opportunities for jobs and training.

Newry and Armagh: DCAL Investment

5. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what capital arts investment has been made in Newry in the past three years. (AQO 4709/11-15)

12. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the current funding from her Department for the Newry and Armagh constituency. (AQO 4716/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 5 and 12 together.

In the past three years, my Department, through the Arts Council, has awarded almost £87,000 of capital funding for arts projects in the Newry area. Those funds have been awarded through funding programmes such as the musical instruments for bands programme and the public art programme.

I visited Newry in the summer and met various groups, including representatives from Sticky Fingers at the behest of Megan Fearon. I am pleased that they have been successful in their bid to bring the Small Size, Big Citizens event here in February 2014.

My Department directs funding to the wider Newry and Armagh constituency through its arm's-length bodies. I will draw the Member's attention to some of that. There are libraries, the observatory, the planetarium and the county museum. Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency also invest money, as does the inland waterways branch for water recreation projects at Clare Glen. Sport NI funds soccer, Gaelic football and boxing. Those are just a few examples.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Does the Minister agree that Newry is grossly under-represented in capital investment in comparison with other towns and cities? I refer to the arts specifically. Will she give an undertaking to work with local partners in Newry city to remedy that situation and to help provide a high-quality arts space in Newry?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I met Sticky Fingers and other groups in the constituency and advised them, and they have all mentioned that there is regional disparity in investment, particularly, but not exclusively, from the Arts Council. They mentioned other arm's-length bodies through DCAL, and I advised them, in the first instance, to have meetings with the chief executives and the chairs and to come back to me after those conversations. Each area that I visit claims that Belfast gets everything and they get nothing, and there is some truth in that for some but not for everybody. I look forward to the result of the conversations that those groups will have, particularly with the Arts Council and sports council, and we will take it forward from there.

Mr Brady: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. I also thank her for her recent visit to the Newry and Armagh constituency; it was

very well received. What other areas of DCAL have made capital investment in Newry and Armagh in the past three years?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said in response to Dominic Bradley's question, there has certainly been investment. NI Screen has invested through the AMMA centre, and community festivals have been done in the Newry and Mourne District Council and Armagh City and District Council areas through the Arts Council. Sport NI has invested over £300,000. The Member was there, as was Dominic Bradley, I think, at the reopening of the library in Newry in April last year. There is also Friends of Millview, Mayobridge Community Association, Newry City Athletic Football Club and St Colman's College. I do not have a full list, but I am happy to write to the Member about other capital investments in his constituency.

Mr Irwin: In the rural hinterland of my constituency of Newry and Armagh, is the Minister aware of investment in community sports in Markethill, Tandragee and Richhill?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have the details of that specific request, but I am happy to write to the Member. In the areas that he mentioned, a lot of investment has gone in to marching bands, pipe bands and silver bands. I am happy to write to the Member with other details.

Gaeltacht Quarter

6. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to provide a project, similar to the Gaeltacht Quarter, in a rural area. (AQO 4710/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. While there are no immediate plans to develop a project similar to the Gaeltacht Quarter, I am happy to enter into discussions with any rural communities that are interested in developing a project similar to Ceathrú na Gaeltachta i mBéal Feirste. The Carntogher Community Association is an example of how the Irish language can be promoted in a rural area through economic, social and environmental projects aimed at developing a prosperous and environmentally sustainable community.

Work is also progressing to consider the viability of an Ulster-Scots hub social economy project inspired by the Cultúrlann in west Belfast. That would also provide a central hub and a base for satellite Ulster-Scots cultural and resource centres and provide strong community involvement as well as connections with the rural areas. In June 2012, the Ullans Speakers Association based in Ballymoney applied for a full-time radio licence. At the end of July this year, Ofcom awarded it with a full licence for an Ulster-Scots radio station. I would like to see similar projects replicated in other areas.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Specifically, what support has she given to the Glór Dhún Geimhin and Glór Léim an Mhadaidh Irish language projects?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not yet given specific investment to Glór Dungiven or Glór Limavady. I am aware that both projects have applied to the SIF programme. Following previous requests, I will ask my officials to meet the groups to see what, if any, support we can give to them. I am happy to look at where the Irish language is used

as a primary regeneration factor, and, in the case of Carntogher, to look at the economy, environment and social provision of services in rural areas.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she give the Assembly any indication of the number of projects that are operating under the Líofo scheme and whether she plans to extend it?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I am not too sure about the number of groups, but I know that almost 4,500 people have signed up for Líofo thus far. The Member will be aware that the programme was launched in September 2011, and the target was to have 1,000 people by 2015. By December of that year, we had reached that target and set another of 2,015 for 2015. We surpassed that and set a target of 5,000. So we are well on the way and certainly hope that it extends. The evidence is that it will.

I have plans to extend the target. I will launch Líofo with Ministers Deenihan and McGinley in Leinster House, hopefully, at the end of this month or the beginning of next, to look at extending Líofo across the island.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

7. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department is tackling poverty and social exclusion through employment, as outlined in the 2013-14 departmental business plan. (AQO 4711/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. One of the of the key ways that DCAL delivers on its commitment to tackle poverty and social exclusion is by creating employment and providing opportunities to people to improve their employment prospects. Appropriate social clauses will be built into DCAL's procurement exercises. Social clauses in the stadia contracts will require contractors to provide over 100 opportunities for the long-term unemployed, apprenticeships and student placements.

The music business support programme included social clauses committing the delivery organisations to providing work and placements totalling 156 weeks for the long-term unemployed. DCAL will also lead on projects such as the Gaeltacht Quarter, which will use the Irish language and culture to generate economic growth and benefits.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Harking back to what I see as one of the keys to tackle these issues — libraries — will the Minister again indicate whether she will reconsider, particularly in the East Belfast constituency, the provision of library services in the new Templemore Avenue school complex? That is quite close to where a library was closed, and the facility could be delivered fairly cost-effectively.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I marvel at the Member's ingenuity in ignoring his own question to ask his colleague's previous question to get it on the record. However, I appreciate that he has lobbied me on this before. I believe that you need a cluster of community activities to help to support a library, particularly in areas of multiple deprivation. I have no plans to go back and reopen a decision that a previous Minister made. However, I am happy to talk to the Member, along with other Members from East Belfast, about the viability of the premises that he mentioned. However, I will not give any guarantees at all.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister explain how DCAL's social clauses for the stadia development are helping to tackle poverty and social exclusion?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, one of the things that I am looking at is the provision of a living wage foundation. When you have huge capital developments, it is crucial that, particularly in the lifetime of this Assembly, opportunities must be provided. We are looking at opportunities for the long-term unemployed, apprenticeships and student placements. We will make sure that we take all steps to ensure that those who are placed in the stadia programmes receive appropriate accreditation. That will help to tackle poverty and will look at challenging social exclusion, particularly for those who live beside such opportunities and who are, more often than not, on the outside looking in. We need to make sure that they are in the middle, availing themselves of this great opportunity that they have.

Sport Matters

8. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has identified public land or countryside in South Antrim for development in line with the Sport Matters strategy. (AQO 4712/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The Sport Matters strategy recognises that to encourage the development and use of open spaces for a variety of recreation and outdoor pursuits, public access to and sustainable use of publicly owned land for sport and physical recreation are required. DCAL, through Sport NI, supports local councils and other stakeholders in considering opportunities in their area to develop public land or countryside.

In 2010, Sport NI commissioned the Outdoor Recreation NI document, which looks to key stakeholders in taking forward the Sport Matters strategy to underpin a mapping exercise for all public land use here.

2.45 pm

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Does she agree that the construction of new facilities would greatly increase and improve child-centred play?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not too sure what Antrim Borough Council's plans are for that, through the RPA. However, it would be missing a huge opportunity not to look at play activities and opportunities, particularly for the very young, in the design or redevelopment of any facility. Through the Sport Matters strategy, DCAL, and its partners, the Department of Education, has been looking at that and raising it as an issue in the rebuilding and redevelopment of any new facilities in council areas.

Education

Immaculate Conception College

1. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education for a formal update on the future of the Immaculate Conception College in Derry. (AQT 171/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I understand that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) proposes to publish a development proposal that would see the closure of the Immaculate Conception College in Derry. To date, no such proposal has been published. If such a proposal is published, it will be subject to a consultation period of two months, during which time Members of the House, the public and interested parties will be able to put across their views on the matter.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he understand the absolute worry, concern and anger of the parents of pupils attending the school, and amongst the staff, that this, the only Catholic post-primary school in the Waterside, has been starved of funding and any form of modernisation for decades? Will the Minister in the future reflect that their opinions are important, and make sure that there is the most effective consultation with everyone, including community leaders, in that area?

Mr O'Dowd: I am legally obliged to carry out an effective consultation with everyone in that area. The reason I brought area planning into place is so that we do not see scenarios whereby — as has been said to me before — schools are allowed to die on the vine.

We want to see schools move forward, in a planned schools estate, providing excellent education for young people in the future. I am not in a position to talk about what has happened in the past, but I will be in the position to do so about the future. If I am involved in the decision-making process and if a development proposal is published, my decision will be about ensuring that all the young people in that area have access to high-quality education services.

Mr Speaker: Mr Hussey is not in this place for question 2.

Learning to Learn

3. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Education whether today's publication of the Learning to Learn strategy means that he has given up hope of an early years strategy. (AQT 173/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My answer is no. The very fact that I published the Learning to Learn strategy this morning proves that the Department of Education now has an early years strategy. The previous early years strategy was published at a time when a greater role for the Department of Health and other Departments was considered appropriate for early years. That strategy ran into difficulties. We recognised those difficulties and responded to the consultation responses, and I acknowledge that the Department of Education had a key role in developing its strategy and needed to put its policies on paper. Learning to Learn does that. It sets out clearly how we are going to invest in our preschool education services and move forward. It also acknowledges that there is an ideal opportunity, in the Executive's Delivering Social Change programme, for all Departments to cooperate and deliver an early years strategy for our entire society. So, I have not given up on any of those things. We have put down a firm commitment today in our Learning to Learn strategy, and we will continue to develop close working links with all the other relevant Departments through the Delivering Social Change agenda.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. What are the implications of today's announcement for the funding for preschools such as the Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre in my constituency in Coleraine?

Mr O'Dowd: I congratulate the Member for getting his constituency mentioned in his question. Learning to Learn will have no negative financial implications for any preschool settings. It sets out a programme of policies and curriculum activities that should be taking place in our preschools etc. There are no negative funding implications in the Learning to Learn programme.

Literacy and Numeracy

4. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education whether he agrees that one of the most deprived sections of our community in literacy and numeracy terms are the young people who find themselves behind bars, and, given last week's Criminal Justice Inspection report, what he can do, perhaps in conjunction with the Justice Minister, to ensure that those young people are not failed for the second time in their lives. (AQT 174/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of that issue as a former member of the Justice Committee and in my role as Education Minister. The unfortunate truth of the matter is that many of our young people and, indeed, older people who find themselves in jail have a very poor educational record and attainment level. That is one of the things that I have focused my policies on to correct. How we move forward with education in our jails estate is a matter for the Justice Minister. However, I have met him to discuss a proposal to move responsibility for schooling the youngest people in prisons to the Department of Education. Those discussions are continuing with officials.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will, of course, be aware that there are excellent examples of good educational practice at Magilligan prison. What can he, as Minister, do to ensure that those schemes are rolled out at the other prisons, particularly at Hydebank and the young offenders' centre, which seems to be a place where good education is badly needed but not delivered?

Mr O'Dowd: Again, I currently have no responsibility in that field. Magilligan is an adult prison. Even if those individuals were outside prison, I would have no responsibility for their education beyond 16, unless they were in a formal school setting to do A levels etc. I think that the Public Accounts Committee published a report on literacy and numeracy that used the example of Magilligan, which appears to be doing good work with its inmates, but that is a totally different scenario from a classroom setting. I advise the Member to raise those matters with the Justice Minister.

Mr Speaker: Mr Sammy Wilson is not in his place to ask question 5.

Teachers: Development Opportunities

6. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education whether he agrees that providing high-quality developmental opportunities throughout a teacher's career is a key element in raising standards in our schools and, in that respect, what lessons he brought back from his recent visit to Canada and the United States. (AQT 176/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware that I was in Toronto and New York last week to look at their education systems. The trip was very useful from a number of points of view. They are facing similar challenges to our own. Perhaps they are on a larger scale in some areas in relation to social deprivation, etc, but they are certainly facing similar challenges. Particularly in Toronto, similar measures to ours have been put in place to raise educational attainment for young people. One of the areas identified there was continuous professional development for teaching staff. We received a significant amount of information on our visit, and we will analyse that further. I found it informative that the Toronto government have given the trade union movement a significant amount of money to carry out continuous teacher development. I will examine that.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra; bhí sé thar a bheith suimiúil. I thank the Minister for his answer. Considering the recent and proposed cuts to teacher development, how does the Minister propose to deliver real improvement through continuous professional development?

Mr O'Dowd: All areas of our education system have seen cuts to their funding as a direct result of British Government cuts to the block grant. Education faced pressures because of that, including continuous professional development. We have to work within the resources that we have. The current resources still allow us to continue with a programme of continuous professional development for our teachers. I do not argue that the measures that we have in place are the best possible. We have to continuously improve even our own measures for teacher development. We will continue to do that, but we will have to do it within the resources that we have.

Visual Impairments

7. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education what his Department is doing to support people who are visually impaired and registered blind. (AQT 177/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each child with a visual impairment has unique needs, and teachers of children with a visual impairment provide tailored advice to meet pupils' individual learning needs so that the curriculum can be fully assessed. Where a visual impairment prevents a child from fully accessing the curriculum, the education and library boards (ELBs) will address that through the statutory assessment process.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. His constituency is one of the highest in the league table. Is there some way that he could carry out an investigation, perhaps with some other Departments, to find out why the North Belfast constituency and his constituency are at the top of the league table?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will appreciate that I do not have the details of that information in front of me now. I suspect that poverty levels might play a role. The Department has a very good working relationship with the Royal National Institute of Blind People. The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out an inspection report of the services in 2011, and the report came back that ELBs provided a very good standard of visual impairment

support. I will certainly investigate further the matter that the Member raises about constituencies.

Mr Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn, and Mr McAleer is not in his place for question 9.

Looked-after Children

10. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education what the education system is doing to help looked-after children. (AQT 180/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Over the past number of years, including under my predecessor, Caitríona Ruane, we have introduced funding formulas to our schooling system. Through those funding formulas, we identify looked-after children and ensure that additional financial support is offered to them. We are also conscious of the additional needs of looked-after children in the services that are delivered to schools, including child psychologists and counselling services. Therefore, we are aware of the additional burdens placed on our looked-after children because of circumstances that are not of their making and that are beyond their control that place barriers on their education. I assure the Member that support is offered to looked-after children in our education system.

Mr Easton: Do all looked-after children have personal education plans, and if not, why not, considering that they were meant to be implemented by June 2013?

Mr O'Dowd: All looked-after children might not require a personal education plan. It is down to the school and the education boards to assess such matters. You cannot simply say that all looked-after children will require a personal educational plan. Let the assessments be carried out, and let those assessments determine what is required for each child.

Mr Speaker: That ends topical questions. We now move on to questions for oral answer to the Minister of Education.

Mr Storey: I apologise to the House for being absent last Tuesday for questions to the Minister for Regional Development.

Area Planning

1. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education what progress he has made on securing a place for a representative of the controlled sector working body on the area planning steering group. (AQO 4719/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I knew that you would not miss me. [Laughter.] The role of the area planning steering group is to support my Department in taking forward work to coordinate and oversee the continuing development of the area planning process and the area plans. Its role is to embed further the area-planning process and to address the gaps in the current area plans, to embed a single approach to area planning and to identify priority areas for action in the short to medium term. I have considered the requests from a number of bodies seeking to gain membership to the area planning steering group, including the controlled sector working group. Although I am continuing to consider the matter, the current controlled schools sectoral support body has no legislative basis. The controlled sector support working group is part of the Education and Skills Authority Bill, which is required

to complete its legislative journey before the controlled schools sectoral support body will have any legal identity.

There is a clear and unequivocal commitment from the Executive and me to establish a sectoral support body for controlled schools. That commitment was clearly reflected in the heads of agreement published by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister last November and in papers that I have tabled at the Executive. I have acted on that by setting up a working group that is representative of the controlled sector. I have tasked that group with the establishment of a body that will represent and advocate for controlled schools. My Department has funded the activities of the working group from October 2012 and has funding in place to support its work through to December 2013.

I have also acted on the commitment in the legislation that I have brought to the Assembly. The provisions in the Education Bill are designed to deliver parity of representation for all sectoral support groups. Passing the Education Bill is, therefore, the quickest route to a defined and funded sectoral support body for the controlled sector with key representative functions — for instance, area planning — that would have a basis in law. I, therefore, suggest that, if the Member is serious about any future role for a controlled sector support body, he should dedicate his energy to the delivery of the Programme for Government commitment to establish ESA in 2013.

3.00 pm

Mr Storey: I thought that that would be the answer that the Minister would give: bring ESA into existence, and all will be well. That is in stark contrast to what the Minister said in the House on 16 April, some five months ago, when he said that he would give serious consideration to the representation of the controlled sector body in area planning. Currently, the controlled sector body is not represented fairly, while the maintained sector, through the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE) —

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

Mr Storey: — which has no legislative position, is at those meetings. Will he rectify the situation by ensuring that the maintained sector has only one representative at those meetings?

Mr O'Dowd: It should hardly surprise the Member that a Minister is keen to deliver on a Programme for Government commitment, the ESA Bill. Five months ago, I was of the firm view that the ESA Bill was progressing as agreed under the heads of agreement of November 2011. Now I am not convinced that it is, and I am deeply concerned that a Programme for Government commitment will be missed in regard to the ESA Bill, and ESA will not be established in 2013. That should be a matter of concern to the entire House, including the Member.

There is no point in us having agreements. We have had several agreements over ESA; I have been involved in negotiations around ESA for five years now. I have several agreements in place with the Member opposite's party. We have a Programme for Government commitment to establish ESA. If the Member is serious about the controlled sector support body, I welcome his belated interest in the controlled sector, because the five years of negotiations were not tied up with the needs of the

controlled sector; they were tied up in the needs of another sector. His belated interest in the controlled sector is heart-warming, but, if he is serious about getting it established, they need to get serious about ESA.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister reiterate how the area planning steering group will work to protect the future of rural schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Contrary to some representations, there is no policy to close rural schools; there is a policy to improve educational outcomes for all our young people. I am on record as stating that those in rural communities have the same right to access to good education as their counterparts in urban communities. I have emphasised to the area planning steering group — indeed, I will be the final decision-maker in regard to these matters — that rural communities need to have access to schools in rural communities. Therefore, there is a clear commitment from me, both in policy direction and terms of reference, that the steering group's task is to support rural communities in the delivery of education.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Will he acknowledge the importance that further education plays in the career and employment opportunities of young people? Has he had any discussions with the Employment and Learning Minister to ensure that there are representatives on the area steering groups?

Mr O'Dowd: I acknowledge both. I have had discussions with the Employment and Learning Minister, and I am pleased to report that a DEL official will sit on the steering group as an observer from its next meeting.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister assure the House that voluntary, integrated and controlled schools will all have an equal position on a par with CCMS in the current deliberations on area planning?

Mr O'Dowd: Their status is outlined in legislation. There is a legislative commitment for us to promote and facilitate integrated education and Irish-medium education, and CCMS is established through legislation etc, so of course they will have their voice recognised, as the legislative format sets out.

Schools: Vacant in South Antrim

2. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Education to outline the number of vacant school properties in South Antrim. (AQO 4720/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Bruslee Education Centre in Ballyclare in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area is the only vacant school property in the South Antrim constituency. In the controlled sector, decisions on the use of vacant buildings, including declaring them surplus, will rest with the relevant education and library board in conjunction with Land and Property Services (LPS) advice. LPS guidance requires all owners of public sector property to keep their land holdings under continual review and to release surplus property with the least possible delay, subject to the need to realise the best value for the public purse. Voluntary grammar, maintained and grant-maintained integrated schools are not owned by the Department. Decisions on the use or sale of vacant properties in those sectors are the responsibility of each school's trustees.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Ballyduff Primary School was sold off. Did the proceeds received from that sale go back in to be used in education?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not aware of the individual school, but, if it fell under the control of the North Eastern Education and Library Board, it has to fall under Land and Property Services' advice and guidance with regard to those matters. Any finances would have to have been returned to the appropriate source, as outlined in that guidance and advice.

Mr Kinahan: In line with his comment about getting value for the public purse not just in South Antrim but throughout Northern Ireland, will the Minister tell me whether many library board areas are leased between either the board and the Department or other parts of government where we are not necessarily getting value for money?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have that information in front of me. There is clear guidance from my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Indeed, it is a principle of government that any agency acting on behalf of government should be getting best value for money. If the Member has concerns about particular incidents or cases, I would be happy to talk to him further, if he wants to bring them to my attention.

Schools: Funding in Strangford

3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Education, based on the reworked 2013-14 budget on the new common funding scheme, what proportion of schools in the Strangford constituency will have a reduction in their funding. (AQO 4721/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Indicative budgets for each grant-aided school were prepared as part of the consultation process. Those budgets are for illustrative purposes only and reflect the delegated budget that individual schools would have received in the current financial year, if the proposed changes had been implemented. My proposals on the reform of the common funding scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decision on those proposals yet. It is not possible, therefore, to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year until those decisions are made. In addition, other factors, such as the increase in the aggregated schools budget (ASB) for next year, overall enrolment levels, the number of pupils entitled to free school meals and the number of newcomer and Traveller pupils etc will impact on funding levels at individual school level.

The independent review led by Sir Bob Salisbury recommended that more funding should be targeted at pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and that this funding should be weighted towards schools with significant concentrations of disadvantage. It should be remembered that investment in schools is on the way up rather than on the way down. The aggregated schools budget is set to increase by £15.8 million next year, and I have already announced my intention to inject an additional £30 million into it over the next two years, targeted at social deprivation. I have not made any final decisions on changes to the scheme. I am open to hearing alternative ideas. The consultation closes on 18 October. I encourage everyone with an interest in education to take part in the debate and to submit their views to my Department by that date.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. I have debated with some local heads in the Strangford area, and it is their clear view that, if the Minister goes ahead, the proposals will hit the most vulnerable. Special educational needs and wrap-around services will suffer, and, in fact, the outcome will be robbing Peter to pay Paul. Does the Minister agree?

Mr O'Dowd: There are no proposals in the consultation to cut special educational needs services, so I am not sure how those principals have come to that conclusion. Special educational needs services have been ring-fenced throughout my time and my predecessor's time, so I am not sure how that conclusion has come to be.

The Member would surely agree with me — we had a discussion about it during a previous Question Time — about the effects of poor educational attainment on the chances of the child. Our prisons are full of young people from a socially deprived background who did not have the chance of a good education or were failed by education in the early part of their life. We know that people with a poor educational background and from a socially disadvantaged background are more likely to suffer poor health and more likely to be unemployed. If the Member and his party are serious about investing in early years and in the early part of a person's life and if there are alternatives out there, I will listen to those alternatives. However, my proposal is that we put more funding into schools that have more children from a socially deprived background. I think that that is a good thing. Exactly the same thing is being done in Toronto and New York because they also recognise that children from a socially disadvantaged background have less chance of succeeding in education. The Programme for Government commits us to tackling social disadvantage, and I believe that my proposals are a step in the right direction in tackling social disadvantage. However, I put the challenge up to the Member and his party: if you have an alternative proposal, please forward it during the consultation process.

Mr Campbell: The Minister referred twice to alternatives and said that, if there were alternatives, we should put them forward. He will be aware that the Chairman of the Education Committee and, I think, the Committee itself have looked at and asked him to examine another way of examining and assessing areas of particularly acute underachievement. Will he ensure that he examines those closely to come to a more rounded opinion?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure which document or proposal the Member refers to. I know that the Committee proposes to investigate further whether there are elements that should mark out disadvantage other than free school meals, and I welcome that. It is going to look at international examples, which is a good piece of work. I will always consider any reports and documentation from the Education Committee. I assure the Member that, if the Committee has or is formatting alternative proposals, they will be given the weight that such proposals deserve.

Mr Rogers: Thanks to the Minister for his answers thus far. I heard you say that you have not yet made any decision on the common funding formula, but there is a lot of fear in hundreds of schools that they will lose money. We are talking about schools with fewer than 105 pupils losing an average of £24,500. What can you say today to give some reassurance to those schools, other than that you have not yet made up your mind?

Mr O'Dowd: It is a consultation process, and I am saying that those schools should respond to that process. Political responsibility comes with being in the Assembly, so, if the Member's party has alternatives to my proposals, I will welcome them.

The consultation is out there. We are targeting social disadvantage, which is the key principle. I will not deviate from that, but, if there is an alternative way to fund the targeting of social disadvantage, I assure the Member and the schools that he refers to that I am open to listening.

I also emphasise strongly that the budgets that schools are working with do not include the additional £15.8 million that will go into the aggregated schools budget next year. They are working on this year's figures. Our schools budget goes up dramatically next year, so all schools will see a percentage rise in their figures, depending on final decisions being made, the number of pupils and the other elements that I read out in response to Mr Nesbitt's question.

Knockbreda/Newtownbreda High Schools

4. Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education for an update on the merger of Knockbreda and Newtownbreda High Schools. (AQO 4722/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development proposal number 237 for the amalgamation of Knockbreda High School and Newtownbreda High School was published by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) on 16 April 2013. The statutory two-month consultation period ended on 16 June. However, on 25 June, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) advised my Department that it had not carried out the required consultation with the schools in its area that may be affected by the three SEELB development proposals: Knockbreda/Newtownbreda High Schools, Dundonald High School and Priory Integrated College, Holywood. The consultation was initiated by the BELB in the week commencing 9 September and ended on 30 September. A response from the BELB is expected in the next few weeks. I will then make my decision on the proposal as soon as possible to provide clarity and certainty for the schools affected.

Mr Newton: Does the Minister acknowledge that the outcomes and the history of school mergers have been mixed at best and that, among the parents and teaching staff of both schools, there are still major concerns? What does the Minister intend to do to assuage those concerns?

3.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the concerns raised during the consultation period by elected representatives for the area, a number of the schools involved and parents' representatives groups, which I also met. I accept that there has been an unacceptable delay in coming to a decision, but we could not reach a decision until that statutory work was carried out by the board. Uncertainty about a decision always causes further concern among the people affected. I can assure parents that any final decision that I come to will be based on educational evidence of the best way forward and on ensuring that a long-term decision is made in relation to the schools in that area and that parents, pupils and teachers can have certainty going into the future of the make-up and shape of the schools estate.

Mr Copeland: Does the Minister consider that we have sufficiently clear direction regarding the future of shared education to wisely proceed with the current area planning process?

Mr O'Dowd: Shared education will evolve over years. The shared education report gives us a sense of the direction in which it is going. I believe that area planning can continue in the absence of a definitive and clear direction of travel for shared education. I advise the Member that I intend to make a statement to the Assembly on the shared education report in the very near future.

I do not believe that shared education will affect the proposals that are before us in any way, given the nature of our society and the physical divisions in our society. We are confident that we can make decisions moving forward. As I said, shared education is evolving and will evolve over a number of years. No one can predict the speed of that evolution, although I hope that it is fast and determined. There may be future opportunities for a greater shared education element in this area and — I am not picking on this area — in other areas.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Will the Minister provide a summary of the current position of the area planning process?

Mr O'Dowd: Area planning has progressed further than many would have expected. We have now completed consultation on draft area plans for our post-primary schools. The primary school consultation has concluded, and the boards are going through the consultation responses before providing my Department with the latest draft.

Our investment plans are based on area planning and the intelligence that has come out of area planning. For me, one of the positive things coming out of area planning is that communities have started to take ownership of their schools. I would like to have seen it happen earlier in some cases but it is refreshing to see communities that have been excluded from their schools over many years taking ownership of them and demanding the right to high-quality education for their young people. That is the way forward for education.

Ms Lo: Would the Minister consider merging those schools into an integrated school, given the big demand for integrated education?

Mr O'Dowd: It is not up to me, as Minister, to make a proposal for integrated education or any other form of education for that matter. It is up to either the school or the managing authorities to come forward with a proposal for integrated education or any other form of education. One of the proposals, which has been referred to, is the expansion of Priory Integrated College in Holywood. I will be in a position to make a decision on that when the other matters have been concluded.

Entrepreneurship

5. Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education what he is doing to promote entrepreneurship in schools. (AQO 4723/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Employability, including entrepreneurship, is a key theme underpinning the revised curriculum,

which aims to better prepare all our young people for all aspects of life and work and enable them to develop as confident and articulate individuals able to play their full part in society and the economy. At primary school level, through the area of personal development and mutual understanding, pupils are given opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and personal qualities related to enterprise and entrepreneurship. At post-primary level, entrepreneurship is covered under the employability strand of Learning for Life and Work with a focus on work in the local and global economy, career management and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Pupils are given the opportunity to reflect on their own skills and areas of self-development; explore the changing concept of career and various types of jobs, including those in the local area; explore enterprise and entrepreneurship; and develop and practise some of the skills and attributes that are associated with being enterprising.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. It is good to hear about some of the work that is going on. In primary schools, most children have one teacher for the year. That means that there is a constant relationship with pupils, and it provides the ideal time to introduce new concepts to open minds. Does the Minister agree that more could be done at primary-school level so that children can learn entrepreneurial skills? Has he considered something like the junior entrepreneur programme, which is being run down South?

Mr O'Dowd: We have a programme of work going on in our primary schools to encourage even our youngest children to think outside the classroom and to think about work skills and where they might go. In primary schools, we have resources, including the 'Anything's Possible!' enterprise story stack for Key Stage 1, the 'Precious Waste' employability story stack for Key Stages 1 and 2 and the 'Out of this World' enterprise resources for Key Stage 2. I am always open to new ideas, of course. New ideas often require resourcing, and our resources are quite limited at this time. However, I will explore further the scheme that is operating down South.

Mr Gardiner: Can the Minister tell us how many previous STEM initiatives have fallen by the wayside? What has been put in their place, or what does he plan to put in their place?

Mr O'Dowd: Off the top of my head, I cannot recall any previous STEM initiatives that might have fallen by the wayside. STEM is now a central core element of our education. It is heavily promoted by the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and rightly so, in moving forward for our individual learners and our economy. I think that we promote it quite well. We have programmes in place between business and education and between business and the Minister for Employment and Learning. So, STEM is out there and is being promoted.

I think that, and I have said this previously in the House, when it comes to careers guidance, the most influential careers advisers continue to be parents. Parents have to realise that our economy and, indeed, the world economy has moved on. STEM subjects are central to any young person's career development going into the future. If we

want to compete on a worldwide basis, or if an individual wants to compete on a worldwide basis, we need to have a firm understanding of the STEM subjects.

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister. Does the Minister agree that one of those good ideas might be ensuring that our universities take a lead role in supporting entrepreneurial education in schools and colleges? Can he tell us whether he has had discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning on that?

Mr O'Dowd: It is not up to me to dictate what our universities do, but there is a good working relationship between my Department and the Department for Employment and Learning and between me and the Employment and Learning Minister on cost-cutting themes. I used an example of where we brought a DEL representative on to the area planning body so that both sides knew exactly what was going on with future infrastructure.

The Member will also be aware of my recent announcement on A levels and GCSEs and that the organisations that were represented on that expert body were the universities. We wanted to hear their views. I have had discussions with our universities about education and employment in its totality moving forward, and I will continue to do so. I have also had recent discussions with key employers in our economy. I have talked to them about what skills they require, what their experience has been of our young people who have left school and what further skills they have to apply in numeracy and literacy etc. I found those conversations very enlightening for the outcomes of our education system and how it interfaces with employment. So there are continuing discussions across a wide range of stakeholders inside and outside our education system, and they are helping me to formulate policy moving forward.

Education and Skills Authority

6. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education to outline the anticipated annual budget for the Education and Skills Authority. (AQO 4724/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is anticipated that the annual budget for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will largely be the sum of the budgets of the existing eight arm's-length bodies that will transfer to ESA. They are the five education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Staff Commission and the Youth Council. The budget in 2013-14 for those eight bodies is £1,511,000,000 resource and £70 million capital. In addition, the Department currently carries out the role of funding authority for voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools. That function, and some other operational duties that the Department carries out, such as capital funding for the voluntary maintained schools, will also transfer to ESA with the associated resources.

Work is ongoing to establish the level of funding for ESA, but at this stage, a high-level estimate of the annual budget would be in the region of £1.8 billion resource and £0.2 billion capital based on the budget available for education in 2014-15.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that detailed information. I am just surprised that there will not be more efficiency if

all the functions go into ESA as opposed to going into the number of bodies that are currently operating. Given that the Northern Ireland Audit Office has indicated that the Minister's Department has the worst efficiency budgeting, will he explain how he will try to improve that in moving from a number of bodies to ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure which report the Member has been reading or whether he has liberally interpreted the Audit Office's report, which I suspect may be the case. My Department is one of the very few Departments that does not have to return money to the centre; because we spend it. We spend it on education, where it is required. That is quite a remarkable feat, given the budget lines that we have. We have a very complicated management scheme for the boards and the bodies that I have mentioned and we have in the region of 1,100 schools, which also operate budgets. All those matters point to the fact that the Department of Education is doing quite well in spending its budget.

The estimated savings of ESA over a 10-year period are £185 million. We could have been making those savings now had the Member's party not been instrumental in blocking ESA. The Member's party has been pulling the strings of other parties in the Chamber to ensure that ESA has not moved forward. Every day and every week, every month and every year that ESA is delayed because of political game-playing between the parties on the opposite Benches, the public purse loses out on millions of pounds that could be used for front line education whether it is in Fermanagh, Omagh, Belfast, Lurgan or wherever. Perhaps, in its deliberations, the Member's party might consider, when it is playing games with ESA and other projects, how much money it is withholding from front line education systems because it wants to play politics over the issue.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister outline where the savings would occur with the establishment of ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: The savings would be largely because of a more centralised administration system, a reduction in senior management posts and a more efficient operating system coming from the amalgamation of eight bodies into one. There will be a centralisation of bodies, but it is my vision, as set out by my predecessor and me, that ESA would be at the front line, in the sense that it would operate in our towns and would be accessible to rural and urban communities, and it would not be centralised in one of our cities or major towns. It will continue to be a local education service, delivering for the needs of local people.

We have to get there. We have spent years messing about on this issue and we are losing money that could be used for front line education services and to allow me to continue with my common funding scheme to target socially deprived areas and not at the expense of other schools. We are losing out on ESA as every day, week and month passes. It is long past time for the Assembly and Executive to realise that.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Education.

Private Members' Business

Car Parking Companies

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the practices of some car parking companies and how they operate; questions the adequacy of signage both on parking times and penalties, as well as the quantum, nature, content and design of penalty demands, the threat of legal action and the absence of appeals mechanisms; believes that we need a more robust code of practice for enforcement and more effective regulation by the British Parking Association; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to meet with the Secretary of State for Transport to outline these concerns. — [Mr Frew.]

Ms Lo: I thank the Members who tabled the motion, which I support. I am sure that many Members have dealt with this issue in their constituency offices. Constituents have contacted my South Belfast office when they have been on the receiving end of these, often unfair and seemingly inexplicable, fines.

I am aware of the inconvenience that an improperly parked car can cause to a neighbourhood or a business. Cars that take up precious spaces can have a significant impact on business. Cars that are parked where they should not be can also cause serious risks to other drivers and pedestrians. I take this opportunity to ask all drivers to be mindful of others when parking. However, I also encourage businesses to think carefully before employing the services of companies to give out tickets on their behalf.

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

3.30 pm

From some of the reports that my office has received, I have learned that workers can often be quite hostile or even rude. They fail to see reason or listen when genuine reasons are given that would mitigate the need to issue a ticket. This can inadvertently lead to bad feeling on the part of customers towards the business in whose premises they may have been parked. That was the case with a constituent of mine, who is aged 84 and who, when parked in a private retail park, had merely forgotten to display her disabled pass. That was a very simple oversight, and the decision to give her a ticket could easily have been overturned if there were a suitable appeals mechanism. My office is helping her to liaise with the owners of that car park.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. The lack of common sense was also highlighted by a Member who spoke previously. I agree with you about the need for an appeals mechanism. However, part of the problem is also the attitude of those who issue the tickets. Even when faced with a reasonable excuse or a common sense reason as to why it should not be issued, they take the view that the ticket cannot be taken back. Those who receive tickets have to write in with their reasons, rather than those who give the ticket saying that they understand and will withdraw the ticket. Does the Member agree that that inflexibility of approach is also part of the problem?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Lo: Thank you. I could not agree more. It was so simple a matter. The woman showed her disabled pass to the worker, and that should have been fine and the matter forgotten about. I thank the Minister for his contribution. I hope that we will get a sensible —

Mr Weir: Thanks for the promotion. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Lo: I hope that we will see a sensible outcome on this issue.

I am sure that no one in the House is calling for the system to be done away with entirely. As I said, for some local businesses, for instance those on the Lisburn Road in my constituency, it is often the only way to police private car parks. As the motion suggests, a clear code of practice for enforcement and more effective regulation by the British Parking Association would ease the problem. As other Members have said, we need a more common sense approach.

If the issue can be dealt with through the Environment Minister meeting with the Secretary of State for Transport, I would support that call. The Minister has a lot on his plate at the moment with the large amount of legislation that is going through his Department and the Assembly, not least the reform of local government. However, I hope that he can find time for this issue because any move to rectify the current situation would be a positive step forward and would be welcomed by all MLAs. I support the motion.

Ms Brown: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I support the motion because I feel that the issue is important, and if it passes successfully, it will demonstrate to the public that the House is genuinely interested in making a difference on behalf of ordinary people.

There are two issues to look at: the regulation of the industry, and the need to examine the practices and methods by which those in the industry conduct themselves. There has long been a perception that motorists are an easy target, and I have some sympathy with that view. Although there might be little that we can do when it comes to fuel duty, vehicle duty and insurance premiums, at least in those instances we are in step with motorists throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. However, that is not the case when it comes to the regulation of the practices of car parking enforcement companies. It appears that we in Northern Ireland are seriously disadvantaged in having any sense of redress against those companies.

There is no doubt that there is a requirement to keep town centres flowing and to ensure that those who abuse the existing parking arrangements are penalised. Of course, if you are a trader, a company or a hospital with limited parking resources, it is obviously in your interests to do whatever you can to ensure that your facilities are properly managed. Most sensibly minded people accept that. They accept that if they have breached the guidelines, there will no doubt be a fine or a penalty. Accordingly, most people will pay that fine and chalk it up to experience. However, that is entirely different from the sense of outrage that they feel when caught in the web of the seemingly outrageous practices adopted by private companies. When it comes to operating in Northern Ireland, those companies seem to be able to operate without scrutiny or guidelines and to be answerable to no one.

If individuals or businesses choose to use a private parking company to enforce a specific parking operation, those companies should be obligated to ensure that the system is fair and transparent and that those who are penalised have the right of appeal and access to a legitimate oversight body that regulates the industry. Many of those caught and penalised are not aware that they have done anything wrong. In many cases, the signage used to mark out the property is perhaps deliberately hard to find and read. Indeed, many of the people who have been caught and issued with either a clamp or a fine are elderly or vulnerable. In this day and age, it cannot be right that companies are permitted to prey on the vulnerable in that way. We have heard from the proposer of the motion how his constituents experienced very large fines that caused undue stress and hardship. No one can argue if caught fairly and squarely. However, today's motion seeks to ensure that Northern Ireland's motorists are not seen as easy prey for unscrupulous operators. It is vital that we act now to protect citizens and ensure equality.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the opportunity to support the motion. Although, thankfully, this has not been highlighted as a major problem in the area that I represent, I recognise that there are a number of concerns surrounding the practices of some private car parking companies. Therefore, as we approach the Christmas shopping period, when you can expect large numbers of people availing themselves of parking spaces in areas unfamiliar to them, it is timely that we take this opportunity to highlight the problems that exist and ask the Minister to address the issue.

In the current economic climate, it is vital that we attract as many people as possible into our towns and cities. However, it is in those very places that parking becomes difficult, and, despite a number of reliable car park owners who operate reasonable practices to manage the well-known parking problems, some consumers will find themselves at the mercy of some of the less scrupulous private car parking companies.

A negative and costly experience in any town or shopping complex will have an impact on your decision to return there. Therefore, it is important that a code of conduct be created and a clear set of rules outlining maximum tariffs and penalties be agreed. It would appear that guidelines have not proven to be very effective. One of the biggest difficulties that I see is the lack of consistency among companies. The rules appear to vary from car park to car park, making it difficult for users to know what is expected of them. The signage relied on to explain the rules is often inadequate or vague. However, there seems to be no such vagueness when it comes to issuing and pursuing penalties. The experiences of many have been well documented in the media. Many of those who have returned to their vehicle to find it clamped or issued with a penalty notice are often unclear about what they did wrong and are rightly frustrated by the lack of an appeal mechanism. With the growing demand for parking spaces, it is imperative that the issue be properly addressed and that private car parking companies be properly regulated, with the same rules and procedures in place across the board. That would ensure consistency of service and expectation, and it would allow users to park with confidence.

Lord Morrow: I, too, support the motion. It strikes me that one chord goes right round the House — I do not think

that I have done two minutes and 58 seconds, Mr Deputy Speaker, as the clock suggests, but anyway — and that seems to be that the motorist has become an easy touch and good to earn a living from, whether through high fuel costs, taxation or insurance. Now we have this debate telling us that we have a big problem with what we would call parking in a private/public sphere.

It is not the responsibility of only the Minister of the Environment to tackle and look at this subject. There has to be some joined-up thinking across some Departments. As we look thorough some of the papers that were prepared for us, we see where the Department of Justice had, I think, work done in relation to this matter.

The Department for Regional Development has a role to play. I wonder whether the Minister, when he responds to the debate, will tell us what, if any, joined-up thinking has been done on this subject. I see his predecessor sitting behind him, and he might be able to give him the odd wink and push here and there, although I know that he cannot speak on his behalf any more. Has he, for instance, had meetings with his counterparts in the Department for Regional Development or the Department of Justice? I do not believe that this is just a stand-alone issue. It would be useful if the Minister could intimate whether he has had discussions with his colleagues in other Departments.

We have two — or maybe three, but certainly two — types of enforcers, as it were, in this parking field. Even the DRD enforcers, namely our wardens, seem to overdo it at times. It is difficult to understand why, for instance, in a town the size of Fivemiletown, you would have three wardens prowling around the town to pick up their victims and hand them a parking fine. That has a direct impact on the business and economics of our towns and villages. Very often, those are big deterrents. This is an issue that I am concerned about in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and I suspect that other Members are concerned about it in their constituencies.

As we look through the notes that were prepared for us, and some of the headline news, we see that one motorist was fined £100 by a firm of clampers. I could think of another word, taking one letter out of that, and I might arrive at a different definition, but I will refrain from doing that today. However, it is important that the Assembly debates issues such as this. Although it maybe does not have the attention that it deserves, as I see from the empty Benches, I do not think that that reflects in any way on the importance of this issue. It is an issue that is beginning to really rile the motorist, and we as a House are right to take cognisance of it.

It is good to see that the Minister in his place and that he thinks the issue is important enough to respond to. Therefore, I hope that, as a result of this debate, we will see this issue moving forward. Unfortunately, this is not a new issue. It has been about for quite some time. I was reflecting on a report on the matter that came to the House of Lords in the early 1990s. It might be more pertinent here in Northern Ireland in recent times, but it is an issue that the Minister needs to take a long, hard look at.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he agree that it is time that the appeals mechanism, which exists in England and Wales, as you will be aware, Lord Morrow, is reviewed to include Northern Ireland? That mechanism should be in place in Northern Ireland to give Northern

Ireland constituents and motorists the same level of protection against those fines.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for making that very salient point. Now is the time. Those who have brought the motion to the House are to be congratulated because theirs is a timely intervention, too. This is the time when, in fact, there should be a holistic look at just how the issue is going forward.

If we take a look at the number of licences that are issued, we would be interested to know just exactly how many licences have been issued. Or is it the case that some have assumed this responsibility without being fully and properly licensed? I do not blame the Minister or the Department for that in any way. However, as a matter of clarification, I would like to hear the Minister tell us how many licences, for instance, have been issued within the past five years here in Northern Ireland to private clampers — I want to make sure I get that right. The point that I want to make is that I fully support this, and —

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

Lord Morrow: Mr Deputy Speaker, you are intimating that, in fact, my five minutes are up. I will abide by your ruling. I am happy to do so.

Mr Attwood: First of all, I agree with Anna Lo that there is a need to protect legitimate commercial interests, not least because, in these days and times, the letting of retail accommodation might depend on whether you can guarantee free parking. Leases have not been signed when people were unable to guarantee that because of inappropriate parking. I also agree with Anna Lo that there is a need for drivers to respect other drivers. All of us will have experience of being frustrated in a retail park by the inability to park because of other people parking badly.

I also want to say that I am entirely confident that the Minister will take forward those issues. I am sure that he will outline how that can be done. It needs to be done not only with a new code, but a code that serves the interests of consumers, not the industry, and touches upon all the issues of signage, the nature of letters that are sent, the tone of those letters, the scale of penalties, and so on and so forth. I have no doubt that the Minister will reply comprehensively to all of that.

I just want to caution about an appeals process. There needs to be one; Paul Frew is quite correct to make that call. However, this is the experience, which I will read into the record, of one of my constituents, who went through an appeals process following the service of a penalty notice by UK Parking Control Ltd (UKPC). This individual parked in a Belfast retail park, went into a shop, did not buy anything and left again. He was then served with a penalty notice. UKPC, after it conducted its own appeal process, replied as follows:

"If you are able to provide a copy of your receipt showing that you shopped at the retail park at the time of the contravention, we will re-investigate your appeal and may be able to rescind your parking charge."

Therefore, the responsibility to prove that he had been in the car park legitimately fell to the driver. The only way to

prove it was to produce a receipt from one of the shops in that centre — impossible when you have not bought anything. All of us have been in a shop and not bought anything. UKPC's approach was that he must prove that he bought something, in circumstances where he could not prove it. That was after an appeal.

Equally as bad was that the agent who was acting on behalf of the owner of that car park at that retail centre justified UKPC's approach in an e-mail to my constituent. The e-mail said:

"Having spoken to the owner this afternoon",

— which was the afternoon of 5 September —

"he believes responsibility to prove that you did not leave the retail park rests with yourself."

Therefore, not only does UKPC require the driver to prove something that cannot be proved, but the car park owner justifies that approach.

In passing, this was the attitude of the owner's agent to my constituent. He said:

"In future, any communication from yourself will not be acknowledged."

He added:

"Your repeated and frequent communication on the subject is not advancing your cause".

He then wrote:

"Something of this nature has to be considered against the standard of spelling out the commercial advantage to the owner".

That is the attitude of not only a car parking enforcement company but an agent and a significant landowner in the city of Belfast. The problem has multiple expressions, not least when the agent said to me, "Do you not have more important things to do than ring about a penalty of £100 or £120?" That is the level of respect for political representatives making representations on behalf of their constituents. So what is the answer? What should the Minister do?

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

Mr Attwood: Car park owners and agents in this city and in Northern Ireland should pull their neck in.

Mr A Maginness: It is very plain that what is required is some form of regulatory intervention. I hope that the Executive or the Minister can provide that. As Lord Morrow pointed out, there are different responsibilities across Departments, but I hope that the Minister of the Environment can produce some form of regulation that will satisfy the various complaints highlighted in the Assembly today.

It is important that there is some form of regulation. The code of conduct is clearly inadequate and has to be addressed, perhaps by providing regulation in a statutory form. The lack of an appeal mechanism, which the proposer pointed out to the House, also has to be addressed. There has to be a robust and independent form of appeal. The disproportionate penalties imposed on people are penal. Of course, the irony is that, in the public sphere, car parking offences were decriminalised quite

some time ago, but here you have the penal imposition of fines. We have to arrive at a situation in which there is regulation, and if fines are to be administered within that context, they have to be proportionate. The fines that Members talked about are outrageous and absolutely monstrous. For an ordinary family on a limited income, such fines represent a very severe penalty indeed. It is quite wrong that those private firms and landowners get away with it. That cannot be right in our society. As an Assembly, we have a duty to all our citizens to introduce reasonableness when dealing with infringements.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He brings me to a valid question: what is the remit, role and responsibility of the car parking companies? Are they there to make sure that vehicles have safe passage and do not bung up our system, whether it be in a retail park or town centre, and that there is free-flowing traffic in our town centres, or are they there to make money on the penalties? We should ask ourselves that very valid question today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: I am inclined to suspect that the latter is correct and that this is a happy money earner for private firms and even the landowners themselves. Penalties for very minor infringements — parking your car incorrectly, and so on — cannot be seen as effective traffic management in the real sense. If there is a real obstruction, action obviously needs to be taken.

It is clear to me, from listening to the reports of colleagues in this Chamber, that those firms go out of their way to impose incredible fines that are quite unsustainable, unbearable and disproportionate to any offence that people might have committed. I believe that the private car parking firms have shown themselves not to be capable of internal regulation and have acted so unreasonably in so many instances that it is now necessary to impose the discipline of statutory regulation. I hope that the Minister will consider that, and I hope that his Executive colleagues, including the Minister of Justice and the Minister for Regional Development, will be supportive of that, so that comprehensive legislation that all of us can support can be brought to the House. That will be to the benefit of the whole community.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I thank all contributors to today's debate. I am very aware of the widespread concern about the activities of car parking enforcement companies, and those concerns have been reiterated by all Members today, many of whom related tales of their constituents and the outrageous actions of some car park enforcement companies.

It is important that Members are very clear about the role of my Department in the activities of those companies. Car parking enforcement companies that work for the owners of car parks, often large and well-known retailers, patrol car parks looking for vehicles that they believe have breached the conditions that apply to the use of the car park. Typically, alleged breaches involve overstaying the time involved, parking badly so as to take up more than one space or cause an obstruction, or using the car park when not a customer of the facility. It is important to acknowledge that all those examples constitute inappropriate behaviour by motorists and that companies that supply car parking for customers, usually free of charge, are entitled to take reasonable steps to

ensure that the facility is not abused and that the users of the car park do not cause problems for other shoppers. Most often, when an alleged breach is spotted by an enforcement company, the driver of the vehicle will not be on the scene. In such cases, the enforcement company will usually place a notice on the windscreen and note the registration mark of the vehicle. The enforcement company then asks for the name and address of the keeper, and it is only in that part of the entire process that my Department is involved. Information is only released to companies that are members of an accredited trade association and for which DVA holds details of their agreements with the landowner. The enforcement company is required to make a separate written request for the information about each vehicle. That request must set out full details of the vehicle — registration, make and model — to avoid information being given about the wrong vehicle if a registration mark has been taken down incorrectly; the date of the alleged incident, which must have been within the past 28 days; and an explanation of the alleged breach and why that could not be dealt with at the time.

It is very important that Members appreciate that vehicle licensing is an excepted matter. It is not devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and remains the responsibility of the Department for Transport. However, as Members will be all too aware, vehicle licensing services have always been delivered locally by DVA, and we, as an Assembly, just last week reaffirmed our commitment to retaining the local delivery of vehicle licensing by opposing the DVLA centralisation proposals. Under the terms of the agreement between DOE and DFT for the delivery of vehicle licensing services, DVA must accept policy direction from the DVLA in Swansea. The relevant legislation permitting the release of data from the vehicles register is regulation 27 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 2002, which states:

"the Secretary of State may make any particulars contained in the register available for use ... by any person who can show to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that he has reasonable cause for wanting the particulars to be made available to him."

Under those provisions, the DVLA policy direction is that data should be released to car park enforcement companies where there are alleged breaches of car park rules. The enforcement companies that get those data are subject to periodic audits to ensure that the data are held securely, are deleted as soon as action has been completed and are not used for any other purpose. To date, those audits have never uncovered any evidence of the abuse of the data in these ways.

4.00 pm

Since November 2009, DVLA has made it a prerequisite of getting keeper information that car parking companies are members of an accredited trade association. Originally, only one trade association — the British Parking Association — was accredited, but, on 24 June this year, accredited status was awarded to a second trade association, the Independent Parking Committee. Accreditation has been awarded initially on a probationary basis to allow the IPC to progress its proposed scheme.

The BPA's code of practice specifies the required standards that its members must meet to retain

membership and therefore their entitlement to obtain keeper information from the vehicle record. The code of practice sets out requirements such as maintaining professional standards in dealing with motorists; no use of aggressive or abusive language; using only uniformed staff who have visible, photographic identity badges; displaying signs at the entrance of car parks setting out the main conditions for using the car park and other signs showing charges and penalties, and the signs must be clear and of a specified size; and not misrepresenting that there is any statutory authority for enforcement, including not misrepresenting penalty notices as statutory penalty charge notices. Although the code of practice represents reasonable standards of conduct, I share Members' concerns about adherence to it.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way. On the specific point about signage, it is clear that, even in the past number of months, car park companies have increased the amount of signage because of media attention to this matter. However, the signage can be very misleading. Once you enter the car park, there is a sign saying, "Three-hour maximum wait: see all other details in other signs". When you drive in, you get the quantum of the penalty in the smaller signs in much smaller text. That is misleading.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that intervention. I agree wholeheartedly, and I believe that a large part of the problem is the lack of uniformity, if you like, across car parks, particularly in signage.

I am also concerned that the BPA acts more as a representative trade body that promotes its members' interests than as a regulator of the industry. Following representations from several public representatives, my predecessor, Alex Attwood, raised concerns on a number of occasions with the Department for Transport in London about the policy of giving virtually unfettered access to vehicle keeper information to car parking enforcement companies. Those concerns are reflected in the motion. They include inadequate signage warning about parking conditions and the penalties incurred for breaches; penalty letters designed to appear as official, legal documents; and excessive penalty charges and overzealous enforcement.

Alex Attwood's representations culminated in a meeting with Stephen Hammond in London on 7 May. Following that meeting, he wrote to Stephen Hammond specifically requesting a fundamental review of private car parking; consideration of the suspension of DVLA release of information to car park operators; and the withdrawal of Departments from the BPA. At the meeting and in subsequent correspondence, Mr Hammond firmly rejected those proposals and declared that he was completely satisfied with the existing arrangements, under which car parking enforcement companies get vehicle keeper data. The release of information to private car parking companies was also discussed during a Westminster Hall debate on 19 June this year on a motion tabled by my party colleague Margaret Ritchie. In the debate, Simon Burns, the Minister of State for Transport made his Department's position very clear. He reiterated that the Department for Transport was satisfied with the existing arrangements and, unfortunately, rejected calls for any changes.

Since coming into office, I have continued to pursue these issues. One particular concern that I and other Members have is the absence of an independent appeal procedure

in Northern Ireland. In GB, the BPA administers and funds an independent appeals system for motorists who wish to contest parking charges. The scheme, called Parking On Private Lands Appeals (POPLA), was established after the implementation of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, a measure that does not extend to Northern Ireland. Included in the provisions of the Act is the creation of vehicle keeper liability to pay parking charges for the use of private car parks. If the driver of a vehicle is not known, the keeper of the vehicle is liable to pay the charges. In my correspondence with the chief executive of the BPA, he has claimed that, without the power to make vehicle keepers liable, an appeal process cannot be implemented here. I simply do not accept that argument, and I have requested a meeting with him next month to press for the extension of POPLA to Northern Ireland.

I am often asked, "What if I get one of these parking notices and do not pay?". My understanding is that, if a penalty charge notice is issued and the recipient decides not to pay, the owner of the car park may seek to instigate court action. Only a court may determine the enforceability of the notice. That would be a civil matter. Essentially, in order to succeed in court, the car park owner would have to show on the balance of probabilities either that the vehicle driver was in breach of an implied contract or that the driver was trespassing. There are obvious evidential and procedural issues involved in taking a non-payer to court, and I understand that court action is seldom taken.

It is wrong to condone the abuse of car parking facilities. We want to see fair and reasonable behaviour by all concerned. The rights of car park owners should be respected and the needs of other shoppers acknowledged. At the same time, conditions for using car parks should be reasonable and clear, and, above all, enforcement should be reasonable and fair. Enforcement should be for the purposes of the good management of the car park to the benefit of both the retailer and the shoppers and not, as some suspect, a money-making exercise for the enforcement companies.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for giving way. This is just a short point on his previous point about the court aspect. Is the Minister aware of any specific cases that have been taken to court and, if so, what was the outcome of those? Has anyone been put on a bad credit listing because of the non-payment of any of those charges?

Mr Durkan: Although I said "seldom", the research that I have shows no record of anyone having been taken to court. However, I do not think that that is comprehensive. As regards bad credit rating, I can check that out and get back to the Member in writing.

I am sure that I am not the only person who suspects that squeezing every last penny of profit out of motorists is the prime objective of many enforcement companies, and it is this that leads to unreasonable and, at times, unscrupulous actions. One argument that has some validity and is often put forward by the car park enforcement companies for retaining the existing arrangements that enable them to send payment notices to vehicle keepers is that the only practical alternative available to them would be the use of clamping, an activity that is still lawful in Northern Ireland but can no longer be used in GB except by statutory authority. Fortunately, there is very little use of clamping on private land in Northern Ireland, and we must acknowledge

that finding your car clamped would be much worse than getting a parking payment notice through the post.

Although the focus tends to be on the car parking enforcement companies, let us not forget that they act as agents for the car park owners, who, as I said, are usually national retail chains. Those chains often get let off the hook, and I urge Members to remember that when they are dealing with complaints from constituents.

I reiterate that DOE's only involvement in the activities of car park enforcement companies is in relation to providing keeper information. Around 11,000 such enquires are made every year, and the companies pay a fee of £2.50 for each. It is important to state that that money goes to the DVLA in London; it is not retained by my Department.

I share the concerns that have been set out by Members. I intend to do all that I can to promote better, fairer and more reasonable practices by the enforcement companies and more effective regulation of their activities. My Department has no statutory authority to regulate the activities of car park enforcement companies on private land. As far as I am aware, no legislation is in place anywhere in Britain —

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

Mr Durkan: — to regulate car parking on private land. I have engaged in correspondence with the Minister of Justice and the Minister for Regional Development on these issues. I will continue to pursue the matter with them, as I will with Stephen Hammond, with whom I have a meeting next month.

Mr Weir: I welcome the contributions from all sides of the Chamber. The issue seems to touch many and various parts of Northern Ireland. Mention was made of the urban setting of Belfast and of towns across Northern Ireland. It seems that the issue impacts on all corners of Northern Ireland; it appears to be a reasonably universal problem.

In the debate, no one has sought to say that the problem applies to every car parking company or made a broad-brush statement that everyone is guilty. However, as a number of Members indicated, the system that we have at present is open to abuse. Indeed, there seems to be plenty of evidence that it has been abused. That is clear not simply from the wide range of locations that were mentioned; Members have mentioned specific incidents. Anna Lo referred to the situation of an 84-year-old woman, and Alex Attwood gave the example of trying to provide evidence in a particular case. An unusual feature of the debate is that it is one of the few occasions in the House on which I remember Alex Attwood sitting down after less than five minutes. The proposer of the motion also highlighted a number of examples. He kicked off with the incident of the husband who was sent to get the shopping and took a little bit longer than an hour. If there was a silver lining to the £150 fine that he received, I suspect that it is that his wife will not ask him to do the shopping again. He may regard that in years to come as a suitable investment for the future.

All joking aside, a wide range of issues have been touched on. It is clear that the focus has been on abuse by a number of private companies. Although there is a desire for joined-up government, I do not think that anyone in the Chamber has been critical of DRD car parks or the level of enforcement in them. The issue of signage was mentioned by a number

of Members. Although, as the proposer indicated, there has been some improvement in the level of signage, the issue is that it can be misleading. It can lead to a situation in which people are not clear about the penalty.

Pat Ramsey mentioned enforcement issues and talked about a situation in which minor infringements had resulted in a large fine. There is also the scale of the fines. We are talking about relatively minor infringements resulting in fines of £100, £140 or £150. That seems excessive. As Alban Maginness said, we need to see regulatory intervention. I will come to that later.

A number of Members, including Cathal Boylan, Anna Lo and Alex Attwood, to name but three, highlighted that it is not just a question of a change in regulation; it is about a change of attitude. As elected representatives, we have all, at times, seen problems with attitude. Mention was made of a lack of respect for elected representatives, with companies asking why we were bothering them. That is felt even more acutely by people who are at the receiving end of car parking tickets.

4.15 pm

Examples have been given of where there is a lack of common sense applied. One of the pleas from Tom Elliott was for common sense on the issue. The one thing about common sense is that there is a lack of commonness about it, and it is rarely used. Often, the people from the ground up show no flexibility once they have pressed the buttons for the ticket and seem to brook no argument or discussion about the individual's circumstances. That seems to be part of the problem.

Then there is the issue of enforcement. Mention has been made of what seems to be a dichotomous situation. Pam Brown, Paul Frew and other Members said that we are dealing with the tip of the iceberg. Although there have been occasions that we can all point to in which constituents have been in touch with us about a particular parking problem, on how many other occasions has it simply been the case that people have bitten the bullet and paid the fine, perhaps because they were intimidated by the threatening letter? The Minister highlighted the position on ultimate enforceability, which seems to be quite weak in many ways, involving companies going to the bother of taking someone to court. We seem to be in the slightly absurd situation of people who are vulnerable, feel intimidated by a letter and want to feel completely law-abiding being the ones who bite the bullet and pay, whereas, at the other end of the scale, people who flagrantly disregard the letter, feel that they are under no obligation to pay and simply ignore it seem to be, if not rewarded, certainly not sanctioned.

No Member here would endorse a situation in which there were no restrictions on parking. As a number of Members highlighted, there are good reasons for parking restrictions and certain levels of penalties. In part, that is because parking plays a key role in keeping the engine of our town and city centres going. There is a need for turnover of traffic and of parking so that someone is not simply parking somewhere all day and taking up a space, destroying that business. I think that everyone accepts that there is a need for restriction, but we seem to have a situation that seems to turn it about face.

Mention was made of the code from the British Parking Association. Although it does not seem to have been a major problem in Northern Ireland, we are the only part of the United Kingdom in which clamping is still legal. There is specific provision in England and Wales making clamping illegal, and, under common law in Scotland, it appears that clamping is potentially illegal there as well. That needs to be addressed, and I welcome the efforts of the current and previous Ministers in trying to raise that issue. In answer to a question that Tom Elliott put on how to deal with the situation, it is clear that simply pushing for a better code and better behaviour may not be adequate. As Alban Maginness said, we need a degree of regulatory intervention, and I appreciate that the Minister's room for manoeuvre is somewhat limited. Whether that comes by way of regulations, by way of separate legislation or by trying to think outside the box on how we can tackle this, it is important that we have that level of intervention.

It was also mentioned that we do not have a proper appeal mechanism. As Alex Attwood highlighted quite correctly, if there is to be a proper independent appeals mechanism, it has to be genuine and fair. It cannot simply be a question asked that more or less rubber-stamps whatever verdict was given, without there being any proper opportunity to explore the issues. Therefore, if we are looking at an appeals mechanism, we need to take care to get it right.

A lot of people are affected by this. As Pam Brown said, we are looking to make a difference to people and to benefit people's lives. Indeed, if we do this properly, everyone should be able to benefit. I welcome the level of support, and I believe that the House as a whole will be behind the Minister in any efforts that he makes to regulate the system.

Reference was made to the previous Transport Minister Simon Burns, who has moved on now to other pastures and, I think, aspires to be the new Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. Obviously, Mr Deputy Speaker, you know what an august post that is, and it is no wonder that someone has given up a ministerial post to take that position. Whether or not that enables us to have a fresh pair of eyes at the Department for Transport, we have to take a look at what opportunities that gives.

For those who are at the receiving end of the level of abuse that has been put in place, those who are intimidated, those who are facing poor signage, rude attendants, excessive fines and, possibly, clamping, with a united voice, we are right behind the Minister in trying to address that problem. I think it will require regulatory intervention, but I hope that, with the united voice of the Assembly, we can send a strong signal that what is there at present is simply not good enough. A message needs to be sent out to some of the parking companies that the Assembly is determined to see change in this field. I welcome the support for the motion from around the Chamber.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the practices of some car parking companies and how they operate; questions the adequacy of signage both on parking times and penalties, as well as the quantum, nature, content and design of penalty demands, the threat of legal action and the absence of appeals

mechanisms; believes that we need a more robust code of practice for enforcement and more effective regulation by the British Parking Association; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to meet with the Secretary of State for Transport to outline these concerns.

Adjourned at 4.21 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 8 October 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Cross-border Area-learning Community to Provide Post-primary Education in North and West Fermanagh

Mr Speaker: Mr Flanagan has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leatsa agus leis an Choiste Gnó as an deis an achainí seo a chur isteach.

I present this petition on behalf of the people of north and west Fermanagh who are involved in a campaign, with the full support of all their local political representatives and the wider community. I welcome pupils, teachers and parents here today for an educational visit and to engage with interested MLAs on their campaign.

St Mary's High School, Brollagh, which serves the rural communities of Belleek, Garrison, Belcoo, Derrygonnelly and Boho, is currently threatened with closure by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and the proposal has been resisted by the local community on a number of occasions.

St Mary's Brollagh opened at a time when the vast majority of people in the area had no access to a decent standard of formal education and very limited access to post-primary education. That includes members of my own family and many other people in the area. Since then, the school has served the local community exceptionally well.

The local community, led by the work of the North West Education Action Group and its chairperson, Theresa Leonard, has overwhelmingly rejected the proposed closure of St Mary's Brollagh. The group has brought forward an innovative and exciting alternative proposal involving the establishment of a cross-border area-learning community involving schools in south Donegal and north Leitrim. The people served by St Mary's Brollagh are from among the most deprived areas for access to services served by the Assembly. Closing the school and forcing young people to travel outside the area would further worsen that statistic and the quality of life of people there.

There is a realistic alternative to the closure of that school on the table, one that involves establishing a genuine and mutually beneficial partnership with other post-primary schools in the area — in Ballyshannon, Bundoran and Manorbhamilton — which would deliver the best possible educational outcomes for the young people of the area.

The community has rejected the proposal for closure. We have brought forward a realistic alternative that enables the school to meet the main parts of both the sustainable schools policy and the entitlement framework. CCMS, with the support of the Department of Education, needs to listen to the local community and implement this cross-border model to help to retain post-primary education in north-west Fermanagh.

Mr Flanagan moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Education Minister and send a copy to the Chair of the Education Committee, Mervyn Storey.

Private Members' Business

Undocumented Irish/Immigration Reform

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

Mr Flanagan: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the large number of people who have emigrated from across the island of Ireland to make a new life in America; notes the positive influence that Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants have had on the political, social, cultural and economic success of the United States of America; further notes with deep concern the continuing hardships endured by the undocumented in America; welcomes the bipartisan approach taken by American politicians to deal with the issue of immigration reform; and supports the call for the introduction of legislation to deal with immigration reform, including a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am delighted to formally move the motion and bring the plight of the undocumented before the House once again. It has been a number of years since this matter was discussed here, and that was long before I was elected to this place. Some very welcome progress has been made in that time, but there is still a very long and difficult road ahead before the issue can be resolved fully.

One cannot think of the circumstances in which the undocumented in America find themselves and not have some sympathy for them. The most recent estimate of the extent of the problem was that there are 70,000 people from across the island of Ireland who are in America without the proper visa. That is roughly the same number of people who live in my own constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which demonstrates the severity of the problem and the urgent need to resolve it.

I, along with very many other elected representatives from across Ireland, am often asked to help individuals and families who are unable to return home, as they would not be allowed back into America if they left. That is particularly difficult at times of family occasions such as weddings and births, and, for people from some other counties, on all-Ireland football or hurling final day — that is not an occasion that we, in Fermanagh, have yet to experience, but we will keep trying. The difficulties facing people are also evident on sadder days when, for example, people are unable to return home for the funeral of a loved one, such as a parent, sibling or friend. Such circumstances are deeply distressing for the individuals and families involved.

We should all be keen to resolve the matter. The most pressing aspect of the problems facing the undocumented is the absence of freedom of movement and people's inability to leave America and return home. Resolution of even that problem would greatly improve the quality of life of so many people in America.

There is no questioning the positive role that Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants have had on the American way of life. Of the 44 American presidents so far, 22 have claimed

— or it has been claimed — ancestry in Ireland. Many other people who have left this country have set up hugely successful businesses or have contributed positively to the success of America in other ways.

My godmother — my mother's sister — moved to Florida before my mother was born, and they never actually met until I was born. Such stories are very common, particularly across rural Ireland, where a complete absence of any job prospects forced many people to leave the country to look for work elsewhere. It is concerning that we are in a similar position once again, with more and more people choosing to emigrate. We, as a legislative body and as elected representatives, need to be very wary and ensure that people leaving these shores for another country comply with the visa requirements of that country. We cannot have this problem starting all over again, whether in America, Australia, Canada or somewhere else.

Of course, there are other very pressing matters that American politicians need to get around the table to resolve; this is only one of them. The other problems include getting the federal Government back up and running, which may be a more pressing matter for Americans. However, the issue of the undocumented is vital and cannot sit on the back-burner. The recent successful attempts to get a bipartisan, cross-party Bill through the Senate was hugely significant, and it was welcomed by many people on both sides of the Atlantic.

However, a bipartisan approach needs to remain, and American politicians need to work together to sort out the problem, once and for all. They all agree that it needs to be resolved. The only way that it can be dealt with is by the two parties continuing to work together to find an acceptable solution. Getting Democrats and Republicans to work together can be a tricky enough job at times, and no sooner had Richard Haass arrived here to mediate in some of our problems than it was suggested that he may need to go back home to mediate there.

Campaigners who have been involved in the issue for decades know that there is still a long road ahead, but they are ready for the challenge. Very many people, some of them current and former Members of the House and of other institutions on this island, have been to the fore on the issue. They have been ably assisted by activists from across Ireland and America who have used their influence and access to American politicians to seek a resolution to this long-standing problem. I am not going to highlight one individual or one campaign group, because, if I did, it would be unfair to those whom I did not name.

In closing, I would like the message to go out from this place that the House fully supports and endorses immigration reform in America. If the motion is passed —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I happily will, yes. Go on ahead, Jim.

Mr Allister: The Member's motion talks about something called the "undocumented": is that just fancy language for those who are in the United States illegally? Does it extend to include those who, perhaps, are there on the run, even from this country, for terrorist offences? Does the Member agree that the proper way to deal with those people is to extradite them to face the outstanding charges? Does he support that, or does he want to gloss over it?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his usual positive and insightful contribution. I am afraid that he is in a tiny minority if he cannot see the actual problem. If he wants to create other things that he thinks are a problem, he is wrong. Those are not the problems that need to be addressed. The problem that needs to be addressed is the fact that around 70,000 people from this island are in America and are unable to come back here, because, if they did, they would not be able to return to America. That is at the heart of the issue. No other campaign or whatever you want to put into the middle of this will divert from that. I ask Members to remain focused on the issue at hand and not to allow any diversionary tactics from a tiny minority to detract from that issue.

In closing, I want the message to go out from the House that we fully support and endorse proper immigration reform in America. If the motion is passed, a Cheann Comhairle, I kindly ask that you send a letter indicating such to the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, John Boehner, and outline that to him directly.

Mr Girvan: This subject could open up a lot of areas in which there is abuse. Visa requirements play a vital role in the security of one's borders and in ensuring that the right requirements are in place when people arrive. Many of us have visited the United States and are aware that an ESTA form has to be filled in. From that form, it is known where you are going and when you are supposed to leave.

I understand that the figure of 70,000 refers to people not only from Northern Ireland but from the Republic. People from Northern Ireland have made valuable inputs to building the economy in the United States of America and opening up the west. However, at that time, visa requirements were not of the same nature as they are today. Similar things happened in Australia, but it was occupied in a different way, with people being sent out there as a punishment.

Why are we dealing with such a matter in the House? I appreciate that a lot of people go to America to spend a year in a university, where they gather experience and, hopefully, bring that back to our own country to benefit us. Some people settle down and get a job, and some may end up getting married. That may well be something that can be dealt with through the ordinary immigration process, but we know what goes on in our own country, where people come in and use marriages of convenience as a loophole to get United Kingdom citizenship and all the benefits that that entails. It is important that America has proper rules in place to ensure that people do not just use a loophole to enter the country and then say that they cannot go back home because they will not be allowed back into the States. Those are the people who have broken the rules.

10.45 am

Mr P Ramsey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Girvan: I will, yes.

Mr P Ramsey: Does the Member acknowledge the significant contribution that Irish and Scots-Irish people have made to America and the positive social, cultural and economic influence that they have had through decades?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Girvan: Absolutely. I have no doubt about that. We know how people from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Ireland have been key to what has happened in America, and we know about the influence that they have had in building business there. People from here have had a key input into some of the major industrial developments in the United States. However, that does not take away from the fact that proper rules must be in place to ensure that people do not abuse the system by going over there and living on the legacy of the people from here who contributed to the economy of that country and to its democracy. I believe that that has been abused in the past. Terrorists from this country have taken the opportunity to go to America, and it has been impossible to get them extradited. We have not been able to deal with on-the-runs, as was mentioned. We have to ensure that that does not continue.

We cannot interfere with another country's rules. We can make requests, but we cannot dictate to another country what it should set as its requirements. It might be fine to allow open season for people from Northern Ireland and Ireland and to let them in, but any Mexicans who want to make their way across the Texas border will be hunted down and pursued. We have to be careful not to ask for special status because we come from here or to claim that, because half of America believes that it is of Irish or Ulster-Scots descent, it is all right for us to go ahead. We are not going to oppose what is being put forward on reform, but proper systems should be put in place to ensure that immigration and visa requirements are abided by and dealt with properly.

Mr Rogers: Given the importance of the issue of the undocumented, I welcome the opportunity to lend the SDLP's support to our exiles in the United States who are caught up in the immigration debacle.

The SDLP is concerned that the undocumented and those who encourage them to remain in America can be treated as criminals. For example, a mother who, when taking her child to school, gives a lift to the child of an undocumented family living nearby would be committing a crime. Giving an undocumented family a lift to church would be a criminal offence. Employing an undocumented person is also a criminal offence that carries a severe punishment.

I welcome the motion, but many would ask why Sinn Féin is getting involved in the US immigration debate. The research shows that it has not asked many questions in the Assembly and has asked little in the Dáil. Some emigrants whom I know — friends and past pupils of mine who live and work in the United States — believe that the reason for Sinn Féin's lack of support in the past is the direct result of that party's close relationship with senior anti-immigration reform figures in America. That is a question for Sinn Féin.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he really think that someone who is stuck in America and is watching the debate wants to hear him engage in an attack on another political party on the issue? Is that really the way that the SDLP wants to conduct itself in the debate?

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

Mr Rogers: Thank you. This is not about attacking anybody; it is about the facts.

The SDLP questions the commitment of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in raising the plight of the

undocumented and getting some positive commitment from the American Administration.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Rogers: Yes, I will.

Mr McKinney: Given what the Member has said, does he recognise that there appears to be a distinct difference in the approaches taken on the matter by the Tánaiste and the deputy First Minister? That was shown by the deputy First Minister's answer to the House last week.

Mr Rogers: Yes. Thanks for the intervention. I would add that, when I recently asked the First Minister a question about this, he said:

"we are talking about illegal immigrants rather than the 'undocumented'". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 87, p245, col 2].

I find that an incredible way to treat our people. Yes, they are our people — unionist and nationalist. Americans do not see any difference in us when we cross the Atlantic; we are all treated as Irish. If anyone wishes to contradict what I have said about Sinn Féin during my contribution to the debate let them give me one example of Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness speaking out publicly in support of the undocumented while visiting the United States.

I consider the SDLP amendment to be completely necessary as the motion is so outdated. What it calls for has been worked at and achieved by the Irish-American groups and through the powerful support of publications such as the 'Irish Voice' and the 'Irish Emigrant'.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Rogers: No, I will not give way any more.

Mr Flanagan: You asked for Sinn Féin to clarify something, and you will not give way.

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Rogers: I assure all those involved in the cause that the undocumented in the United States and their families here in Ireland fully appreciate the tireless, never-ending work that has been carried out in preparation for and during the lobbying process. It is their dearest hope that those efforts will one day be rewarded. The heavy lifting has been carried out meticulously by lobbyists, especially by the Irish ambassador to Washington, Anne Anderson. Irish America now awaits action on Capitol Hill. We can best assist the hard-working groups and the undocumented by calling on the US House leadership to bring an immigration Bill to the Floor of the House for a vote.

I wish to remind Members that, as we debate the problems of our exiles in America, my South Down colleagues and I have been advised of yet another tragic case involving an undocumented young married man from County Down who has been locked away in prison. What joy could any Administration get from incarcerating a young, ready-and-willing worker in a state prison in America? That young man has been locked away from his wife and family since July.

There are believed to be 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, including up to 50,000 undocumented Irish. From what I know, each Irish person caught up in this debacle is working, paying their way and contributing in full to the fiscal demands of the US Government through their taxes.

Today, a massive rally in support of immigration reform will take place in Washington DC. Last Saturday, 5 October, was known as the National Day of Dignity and Respect in America, and major rallies took place in over 180 cities coast to coast. The rallies were organised in an effort to restart the push for comprehensive immigration reform led by a group of bipartisan lawmakers earlier this year. At every event on Saturday the call went out that it was time for both parties in Congress to put aside their differences and stop trying to make this a political game. On behalf of the undocumented in the US, the same principle should apply in the Assembly. Although our voice is small in global terms, we must do what we can to help our exiles in distress and ensure that an immigration Bill comes to the House of Representatives.

Mr Copeland: I must say that I am somewhat surprised at the motion tabled by Sinn Féin. The undocumented, as they have become known, and immigration reform in the United States are, no matter what we think or want, matters for the Government and the politicians in the United States. Therefore, what merit is there in this House using valuable debating time on an area where we can effect little change? One in five of our young people is unemployed, families struggle with rising costs and welfare reform looms before us. The Assembly must offer leadership where it can and make a difference, and I am not sure that we can do that in this case.

No matter what way you couch it, what we are dealing with here are illegal immigrants. The Ulster Unionist Party is against illegal immigration in all its forms. We should adopt a consistent approach to that, and I have no trouble in saying so.

During Question Time on 23 September, the First Minister was asked whether he had made representations on the issue during his recent visit to the United States. His response was this:

"I do not think that it is a job for me to make representations — it is for the Irish Government to deal with Irish passport holders — nor do I think that it would be right for me to persuade the Congress or Senate of the United States in these matters." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 87, p245, col 2].

I must say that I echo that sentiment. Of course, some so-called undocumented illegal immigrants have made an important contribution to the United States, and I am sure that many in America recognise that. I also welcome the pathway to US citizenship that already exists.

The motion also highlights the contribution of the Scots Irish — Ulster Scots, if you prefer — to the political, social, cultural and economic success of the United States. That is particularly evident in the fact that 17 of the 43 American presidents were of Ulster ancestry, and the Ulster Unionist Party is proud of that. Indeed, I am shortly to meet the American consul to discuss the large numbers of people who find themselves disbarred from a holiday at Disneyland because of criminal offences allegedly committed over the past 30 or 40 years. Incidentally, the position of consul to Belfast is the oldest continuously running United States diplomatic posting anywhere in the world — not to London, not to Dublin, but to Belfast. I will come to the reasons for that later.

We believe that there is huge untapped potential in genealogy tourism. For example, Castlereagh is home to the only United States military cemetery on the island of Ireland, which, at one time, held the remains of Private First Class E Perkins, the first American soldier killed in the European theatre of operations. I think that it was Theodore Roosevelt who proudly said that the American revolution was born in the blood that flowed in the veins of the members of his family when they manned the walls of Derry in 1688, which is a big statement.

As I have outlined, the merits of the motion are, in my view, questionable. I do not think that they are relevant to us, and I do not see how the Assembly can play any part in influencing immigration reform in the United States. That said, we appreciate the help of Richard Haass in facilitating some of our own solutions. I am not sure that the US is quite so keen on a reciprocal arrangement for our help in framing its immigration policy. I think, sir, that we have troubles enough at home and so little time to adequately deal with them to become involved in the internal affairs of the United States Government.

America is famous for a large statute at the entrance to New York called the Statute of Liberty; its proper name is "the Statute of Liberty and Freemasonry", which is not widely known. Send us your huddled masses, but, please, make them go through due process and make them abide by the law in exactly the same way as everybody else is required to do.

Dr Farry: I support the motion but not without some caveats. I think that it is appropriate for the item to be discussed in the Assembly. We have, on occasions, advised other Governments, including one on this island, about actions that they should take, so I do not see a major breach in the approach that has been taken in asking the United States Government to do something. This is also an issue that is close to home, in the sense that those who are undocumented have family members who are our constituents here in Northern Ireland and elsewhere on the island. Therefore, it is of direct relevance to our constituents, whose lives are affected by the fact that their loved ones cannot come back home legally and then return to the United States. Therefore, they cannot attend family occasions, as Phil Flanagan outlined.

I also put it on record that, if anyone has been involved in violence, including terrorism, there should be extradition from the United States back to the United Kingdom. That process has not always worked. However, I believe that that is a red herring in respect of the wider issue. The vast majority of people who are undocumented have had no involvement whatsoever in events at home that none of us should be proud of.

11.00 am

This is not about us endorsing illegality. Once this issue is properly addressed in the United States, it is important that the situation that evolved over the past number of years is not allowed to develop again. We have a duty here to advise young people who want to work, initially legally, in the United States that, if they decide to overstay their visas, they will put themselves in grave trouble. We should not allow any young person to go into that situation blindly.

The fact is that there are some 10 million to 11 million illegals in the United States, including the undocumented

Irish. If the United States pursued the legal process to deal with every one of those, potentially leading to deportation, its legal system would be clogged for centuries. The resources are not there to process that number of people. So, from the perspective of the United States, a pragmatic solution has to be found to address illegal immigration.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate his contribution to the debate. He spoke about the crisis of somebody in America, maybe when a family member died at home and they cannot come home. It is also the case that many young men in America with medical problems will not, for fear of deportation, go to hospital. We know the case of John Thompson, from Garvagh, who lost his life just a few years ago. If he had sought medical care, he would be alive today.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Dr Farry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Ramsey makes his point well, and I echo the aspect that he added to the debate.

The United States has a long and proud track record of immigration. It had very much an open-door policy until the 1920s and, since then, employed much more restrictive practices. There has been a long tradition of emigration from the island of Ireland to the United States, and that continues. As a liberal, I believe in open borders for people, goods and services.

Obviously, we want to keep our people in Northern Ireland and on the island. Although it is good for people to get wider opportunities to see the world, we should always remind ourselves that our first duty is to constantly work on improving the economy at home and creating more employment opportunities. I believe that the Executive are seized of that issue. Creating more opportunities for young people here is very much in our mind as we look to an investment conference this week.

Nevertheless, we have to address the situation as we find it. Those who tabled the motion are overgenerous in saying that there is bipartisan support for immigration reform. Lessons were learned on the back of the 2012 election about how people voted, which the president was certainly aware of. The Senate has now endorsed immigration reform on a bipartisan basis but the House of Representatives is clearly not taking up the issue.

Although border security is important for the United States, putting it first misses the point in that there are huge business, economic and social issues for finding a path of legality for as many people as they can. There are health and welfare issues, as well as issues about formalising unofficial employment. The Hispanic community, in particular, is the backbone of many services in the United States, and many sectors of the economy depend on unofficial immigrant labour.

It is fine to talk about trying to resolve this issue in isolation, which, in some ways, may be a simpler issue politically for some. I would not be unwelcoming of that eventuality, but we have to remember here that this is best done as part of comprehensive immigration reform in the United States that addresses the needs of the entire community —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Dr Farry: — including the massive Hispanic community.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i bhfahbar an rúin. I welcome the opportunity to speak in favour of the motion. I remind Members that, as far as Sinn Féin and I go, my maiden speech was on the same subject. I feel very strongly about it. It is sad that some contributions have already been negative. That is a negative start to a debate on what people out there are looking for from the Assembly, which is support for reform. That is what it is about.

I can speak personally about this because I have family members who are now citizens over there, but I remember a time when they had difficulties. Therefore, I know the difficulties they experienced. Let us leave the legal side aside. When we get into that, we get into meanings and everything else. Let us leave that aside and talk about the human reality of what those people face. This is what I want to contribute to the debate. People do not see that side. Until you live it and experience it, you do not realise exactly what is going on. Not long ago, we had a meeting attended by a number of parties. Members sitting here now who have spoken or will speak in the debate supported those people making the case for reform in the States. I want to try to keep my comments positive. What we want to try to achieve is broad support from the House on the matter.

At the heart of the motion is recognition of the extent of human suffering and hardship that is being felt by many families owing to the current circumstances of many migrant Irish workers in America and the uncertainty that, for many, blights their very existence. Over the years, many people have left these shores for various reasons. The majority of them left primarily in pursuit of better employment and economic opportunities. Many of those souls have accumulated in the United States.

The people of this island have had a long, historical association with America. They have made a rich contribution to the fabric of that country economically, physically, socially and culturally. Their contribution has created a lasting and enduring bond between our countries and their peoples. It is the closeness and familiarity that is created by that bond that continues to cause many people from here to gravitate towards the United States. Although those people continue to make a positive and meaningful contribution to the American economy, many have no formal immigration status there. It is estimated that some 50,000 to 70,000 undocumented Irish immigrants currently live in the United States.

I want to thank the Assembly Library team for its research paper. I will refer to a wee piece from it. It states that immigrants are entrepreneurial and create jobs in the United States and that they started 25% of the highest-growing companies between 1990 and 2005.

That is the contribution that immigrants have made to the United States. Part of that contribution was made by Irish people. For the vast majority, the very fact that they cannot come home creates significant difficulties for them. The opportunity to return home to visit relatives is never an option. People cannot come home for funerals, weddings and special occasions. I want to put on record my suggestion, which is to support freedom of movement. We are calling for that today, as well as supporting the motion. I am disappointed that Members are trying to score political points on the issue. People are in the Public Gallery today to watch us and look for our support. I hope

that other Members who contribute and respond to the debate will support the motion fully. I will leave it at that. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mrs D Kelly: I, too, support the motion. From a very human perspective, we should all be compassionate to those who are separated — often because of the lack of economic opportunity here in their homeland. They have had to travel great distances to build a life and a better future for themselves. That is a matter of some regret. I ask that Members show some compassion when they vote on the motion. This is not an issue that affects only one community or the other, and the House should unite on it.

I pay tribute to the successive Irish Governments and, in particular, to the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste who made representations on behalf of the undocumented Irish over the summer months, and, indeed, to the senators and lobby groups, which Mr Flanagan referred to in his opening comments, that have worked tirelessly on behalf of the many people affected.

I think that it was Senator Edward Kennedy who said back in the 1960s that the issue around immigration was disproportionate against the Irish at the time. In more recent months, President Obama, speaking about a White House report published earlier this year, stated:

“the report finds that the Senate-passed bipartisan immigration reform bill:

Strengthens the overall economy and grows U.S. GDP: Independent studies affirm that commonsense immigration reform will increase economic growth. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that enacting the Senate immigration reform bill will increase real GDP relative to current law projections by 3.3 percent in 2023 and 5.4 percent in 2033 – an increase of roughly \$700 billion in 2023 and \$1.4 trillion in 2033 in today's dollars. A larger labor force; higher productivity and investment; and stronger technology, tourism, hospitality, agriculture, and housing industries are just some of the key ways that immigration reform strengthens the U.S. economy.”

I think that President Obama finished by saying that immigration reform is common sense.

I ask the House to display some element of common sense and humanity in assisting those who find themselves in such unfortunate circumstances. Indeed, we know only too well the importance of the Irish vote when it comes to presidential elections. Those who suggest that what is said in the House will have no bearing on Irish America are deluding themselves. This affects people from right across our communities. We all represent people who have found themselves facing this set of circumstances. I ask —

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will indeed.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree with me that, despite the American Government's particular interest in Northern Ireland for many years, there has been a failure to recognise that something called the Troubles happened, when young people from both communities fled this country, not because they were on the run but because it was dangerous for them to remain in the areas they came from, so their only option was to leave, and that it is wrong

that when those people are caught now, they are put into orange boiler suits and thrown in jail?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mrs D Kelly: The Member's contribution was quite passionate. I am sure that he knows people who have found themselves in that situation. I recently spoke to a family whose son was detained for over two months, and they had no knowledge of his whereabouts. We know only too well about the decisions that families took to keep their young people, particularly young men, away from the violence that erupted here over 30 years. I, therefore, ask Members to take all those matters into consideration when they vote on the motion.

Mr P Ramsey: It was not my intention to speak in the debate, but I feel that it is important to reflect some of the issues raised by my constituents who live in the States at the minute. I think that John Dallat is quite right: during the conflict in Northern Ireland, many hundreds, if not thousands, of young people left because of the conflict and because they wanted a better way of life. It was not just Catholics in the Bogside who did so; it was Protestants from the Shankill Road and across Northern Ireland. Like Dolores Kelly, I encourage Members to support the motion. It is apolitical; it is a very humane motion that is trying to deliver, first of all, a bit of peace of mind to the many thousands of young people who find themselves in America, some of whom we know or are relatives of ours in some way.

I think that Members have missed the point. Some acknowledged the contribution that Irish or Scotch-Irish people have made in the United States. All those who went in the past, including those connected to the American presidency, were illegal immigrants themselves in different times and circumstances. They felt the need to cross the Atlantic, as did many people in Northern Ireland in particular, to secure employment. That was the main reason. It was not for any selfish reason but was to find sustenance to send back to their families, and young people continue to do that.

11.15 am

I was in America in March with Alasdair McDonnell and Alex Attwood, and we met senior departmental and state officials. This issue was high on the agenda because we felt that the onus was on us to put the message across and to give support to the families back home. As the Minister said, although he was speaking as a private Member, there are families in Northern Ireland that are desperate to see their sons and daughters, who may be coming of age, with parents getting older or having chronic illnesses. Some parents may never see their sons or daughters again. Unfortunately, some families may have lost a son or a daughter, and they cannot come back home for the wake or funeral. We are also dealing with that context.

The SDLP has been very consistent over the years, and I acknowledge the role of a former colleague P J Bradley, who was very firm on the issue and is probably texting away at the minute to make sure that we get the right messages across. I acknowledge PJ's contribution. This has been a long, long journey for so many people across the island of Ireland. I say to my colleagues the unionist Members: this is not a religious issue. It is about decency. I referred earlier to a young man, John Thompson from

Garvagh, who, like many others, made a significant contribution, was paying his taxes and so on, but did not have a green card. He was in America for seven years. How many more young people do we want to go down that road and be frightened that, if they go to a hospital or a doctor, they will be served with papers to deport them to Ireland?

People said that it is not an appropriate motion, but I think that it is. I think that the latest figures show that nearly 1,000 people a week are leaving the shores of Ireland because of the recession. It is no longer because of any conflict. Our employment figures in Northern Ireland are high and are worse than those in any other region. In some cross-border regions, including my constituency, unemployment is 3% higher than in any other constituency in Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, quite often, the wrong impression is given of the young Irish people who are in America? They are sometimes portrayed as a burden on American society whereas they are, in fact, a valuable asset, as Mrs Kelly pointed out. They contribute to the economy, create jobs, contribute to cultural and sporting life in America and, as such, should be given due recognition as citizens in America.

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

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome Dominic Bradley's contribution. It is important that the Members opposite reflect on that.

The Bill that is going through its stages in America will give temporary legal status to immigrants who arrived without documentation before 31 December 2011. It is not for people who are travelling but for people who, historically, have been in America leading up to that date. That will allow them to work and travel without fear, with the proper documentation. It will also enable them to live without fear of deportation, which so many face. If they are guilty of anything or there is anything on their character either here or there, they will not get those papers. It is about ordinary, decent people who have travelled to America to try to create a better opportunity for themselves and their families back home. We will do the decent thing today and give consensual support to the Sinn Féin motion. It is a worthy motion that will be well received by thousands of families not only in Northern Ireland but on the island of Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le gach ball den Chomhthionól seo a labhair ar an rún seo. I thank all Members who spoke to the motion. Ba mhaith liom críoch a chur leis an díospóireacht seo. My job is to bring this to a conclusion.

The proposer of the motion, Phil Flanagan, made a number of interesting points about progress being made but there still being a long way to go. He talked about 70,000 people from the island of Ireland who are directly affected by this in the United States, and he put that in the context of his constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which contains, roughly, that number of people. He talked about people missing family and community events and focused on the issue of freedom of movement. Another theme of his speech was the social damage that emigration does to families.

I commend Phil Flanagan for hosting an event, some months ago, in room 342 in this Building. Members of other parties attended; of course, they did. It was addressed by, among others, Fianna Fáil Senator Mark Daly; Bundoran Sinn Féin councillor Michael McMahon; and others, by video link, from the United States, including Kieran Staunton.

There was an intervention from Jim Allister, who wanted to know who these people are that we are talking about. Members explained that we are talking about real people from this community, many of whom are, in fact, employers. Phil concluded by calling on the Speaker to write to Speaker Boehner to the effect that this House is supportive.

Paul Girvan emphasised the need to comply with visa requirements. He did not want an open season. Of course, everybody can subscribe to that. He acknowledged that local people had made positive contributions to the economy of the United States. When he talked about "local people", I thought about people from my community, such as Pat Donaghy from Carrickmore, who left here in the 1950s and formed a company called Structure Tone, which is now one of the biggest construction companies in New York. I also thought of Fay Devlin, who formed a company called Eurotech, in New York as well. They are major employers that do not fall into the "undocumented" category, but I am sure that many who have worked for them on the east coast of the United States do.

Other Members wondered how relevant this is. Most Members, I think, attested to its absolute relevance. For those who are wondering about that, emigration to the United States has been and is massive from places, not least from my own County Tyrone. Many have gone to Philadelphia and New York.

Sean Rogers spoke next, and he started by talking about people not deserving to be criminalised for giving a lift to an undocumented person or for assisting such a person in any way. I was disappointed that Sean Rogers accused Sinn Féin of minimal involvement. I felt that he was being negative for the sake of it. It was the only really discordant note in the debate, and I do not think that it was warranted, because the evidence is to the contrary. Rather than cite it here and now, I will say that even a quick Google check on interventions by our party leadership over the decades in the United States would attest to that fact. The involvement of Seán Crowe, our TD in Dublin; the involvement of councillor Michael McMahon and of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness — all of them have spoken about this issue ad nauseam at the highest level in the United States. I will write, personally, to Sean Rogers with evidence of Sinn Féin's involvement in this debate, rather than it becoming a major theme in my reply.

Mrs D Kelly: Ad nauseam.

Mr McElduff: Aye.

The issue does not belong to any single party. It does not belong to Sinn Féin. It belongs to us all, and that is one of the reasons why I mentioned Senator Mark Daly in particular, who has made a brilliant contribution to this campaign, to date. My colleague from South Down, Chris Hazzard, is in Washington and is raising the issue with people of influence there where he can do so.

Michael Copeland said that we have enough of our own worries, but we have not abandoned our people who have emigrated either. It is not a waste of time, and I think that most Members agree. Stephen Farry felt that it was an appropriate item to be discussed, but wondered whether we were being too optimistic in describing the support of the Republicans and the Democrats in the United States as a bipartisan approach.

Cathal Boylan referred to the human reality and cited personal, family and community experiences. He reminded us that immigrants are often entrepreneurial, and he painted the scenario of people who wish to come home for family funerals. He also supported the call for freedom of movement.

Dolores Kelly paid tribute to the Irish Government at various levels and emphasised that Obama's support for immigration reform is acknowledged and crucial. She described it as being common sense and humanitarian. John Dallat wondered why people left, and then provided the explanation of economic disadvantage, effects of the conflict, and so on. Pat Ramsey said that for someone to go to a hospital or doctor's appointment only to possibly face the prospect of being sent home is too difficult for many families to countenance. Dominic Bradley said that it would be wrong to characterise young people who emigrate from here as a burden on any society; rather, they are often an asset.

The tone of the debate was generally good, although I was very disappointed with one discordant note that was completely unnecessary and certainly out of character from my knowledge of Sean Rogers to date. I felt that there was absolutely no need to end the common approach here. I welcome the fact that Members opposite have declared that they will not oppose the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the large number of people who have emigrated from across the island of Ireland to make a new life in America; notes the positive influence that Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants have had on the political, social, cultural and economic success of the United States of America; further notes with deep concern the continuing hardships endured by the undocumented in America; welcomes the bipartisan approach taken by American politicians to deal with the issue of immigration reform; and supports the call for the introduction of legislation to deal with immigration reform, including a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin]
in the Chair)*

Royal Mail

Mr Principal 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.

Mr Attwood: I beg to move

That this Assembly considers Royal Mail to be a vital public service; notes with concern the added costs to Northern Ireland businesses and consumers if the universal service obligation and uniform pricing are withdrawn as a result of privatisation, which could result in reductions in the wages of the lowest paid workers and other multiple negative impacts on prices, services and standards, including the future provision of rural postal services critical for isolated communities, the elderly and other rural dwellers; and calls on the coalition Government to abandon their proposals.

I wish to acknowledge three things, the first being that the co-sponsor of the motion, Stephen Agnew, is not in the House today. He is overseas. However, we spent some time drafting and shaping the motion together. He sponsored the Communication Workers Union (CWU) meeting here last week and I know that he will fully support the motion and all those who speak in favour of it.

I also acknowledge the trade union and the workers. One thing that struck me powerfully at last week's meeting was the high level of wisdom and responsibility outlined by the trade union on behalf of the workforce and the acknowledgement that there are changed circumstances. We live in different times than was the case 20, 30 or 40 years ago, and the model of public ownership needs to be adjusted and changed. That can be done in a very successful and powerful way. That came across, not just at the meeting last week, but in the wider commentary around this proposal from the unions.

I acknowledge the workforce, whose argument is not about protecting vested interests or clinging to public ownership for its own sake; it is about the best character and nature of public service for Royal Mail at this time.

11.30 am

Two weeks ago, John Dallat replied to the debate on the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) motion. All who were in the Chamber on that occasion will remember what happened at the end of the debate, when those in the Public Gallery who were representing the DVA workers from Coleraine stood and applauded. That was certainly the finest moment in the Chamber since the summer recess. Arguably, it was the finest moment of this mandate. For all the controversy and conflict that characterises this Chamber all too often these days, the Assembly spoke as one and showed its best authority on that occasion by standing in solidarity with working people and ensuring that devolution relates to the experience and challenges of people's daily lives. I trust that that spirit will inform this debate.

I will outline five arguments about what is planned and ongoing, and which may be confirmed by the British Government by the end of this week. We hope that, at the end of this week, it will not be the case that the flotation will be confirmed and part of the business sold off. I will make five arguments about why it is a deeply flawed and foolish enterprise by the coalition Government.

Royal Mail is more than a business with a profit and loss account. It is more than its great workers. It is more than a universal postal delivery service, six days a week at a common price. It is very much part of the fabric of our society. It is a societal element that, in providing a public service, creates cohesion. It includes people who might otherwise, for geographical or other reasons, feel a sense of exclusion. It encourages and enables business and trade, and it gives quality to the life of all aspects of our society. If the model that that service provides is part of the character and quality of the lives that we lead, it should be changed only after proper consideration and wisdom.

Why should the model not be changed in the way in which the British Government are imposing? First, it may have been an argument 10, 20 or 30 years ago that some models of public ownership were not all that they should have been. That argument does not prevail when it comes to this service because it is a model of public ownership that works, and is working better. It is a public service that, as the unions acknowledge, needs to further change and modernise.

Secondly, the most recent audited profits were in excess of £400 million, the pension deficit issue is being addressed, and there is proof that the service is adjusting to the changed market conditions and the changed nature of commerce, not least the growth in parcel delivery. All those factors demonstrate that that public service is adjusting, changing and modernising. They also demonstrate that it is a public service that should be retained in public ownership to ensure that that model, which I believe is the best model to manage services generally, is even more successful and sustainable in the future.

Thirdly, it is becoming abundantly clear that the British Government shaped the sale of the service to attract private investors. By luring in big corporations, especially corporate interest from outside Britain and Northern Ireland, to buy what is on offer, there will be a £1 billion shortfall in what the actual value of the service might be when it is sold. That demonstrates the true purpose of this exercise, which is to undervalue in order to attract investors, for whom, because the service has been undervalued, the price of shares will go up. At that time, the British Government will again step in and sell the rest of the business to the private investor world. That is what is driving this particular flotation: low pricing to encourage big investors to encourage the price to go up to enable the Government to sell off the residue of what remains. That is flawed logic and a flawed strategy, and it will come back in the face of the public service.

The fourth argument is that, on the far side of this, when this service is in private hands and is modelled to create profits, there is an inevitability about what the service will look like. To engineer and create further profit for a privately owned business, the new practices to cut costs will come in. You only have to look at the experience in London, where some of the service has been privatised, to see the practices of TNT around zero-hours contracts, pay

rates and cherry-picking of the business. Looking at that, you will understand that, after full privatisation, you will see the full impact of what privatisation will mean, despite what statutory guarantees there might be at this stage. In that space, the universal service will be jeopardised, come under stress and get fundamentally squeezed and compromised. In that space, a six-day-a-week service at a common price to all parts of Britain and Northern Ireland will be compromised as sure as night follows day.

Why are the British Government doing this now? This is the fifth point. They are motivated by the need to get more balance with their internal budget, and they are sacrificing a successful public enterprise that, compared even with recent years, is more and more successful. The decision is driven by budget and, on the far side of the sale, it will be driven by profit.

All that will come home to this part of Ireland. Why? Because the character of Northern Ireland is different. One of the great wonders of this part of these islands is the rural and dispersed nature of our society. That is reflected and needs to be reflected in all sorts of public policy, including housing strategy, planning strategy or industrial strategy, although the experience of Stream last week indicates that is not necessarily signed up to by all. To deepen the rural, dispersed character and nature of our society, you need to maintain public services and, after privatisation of this public service, it will be our people in the rural areas —

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

Mr Attwood: — who will see first the excesses of what the British Government are now proposing.

Mr McQuillan: I declare an interest as a member of the Royal Mail pension scheme. I support the motion as an MLA for the largely rural constituency of East Londonderry, and I thank the Members for securing the debate. I apologise that I could not attend last week's event in Stormont held by the union.

The first paragraph of the Government's paper 'Royal Mail: Sale of Shares' states:

"The Government's primary objective in relation to Royal Mail and postal market reforms is to safeguard the universal postal service in the UK. The one-price-goes-anywhere, six-days-a-week universal postal service provided by Royal Mail is part of the social and economic fabric of the United Kingdom. Royal Mail is the only company currently capable of providing this service which is vital to consumers, businesses and the UK economy."

I begin, therefore, by asking the obvious question: why sell it off? Royal Mail is like any other public service and should be protected. It is a front line service for a vast number of the population of the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland.

As a former Royal Mail worker, I have seen at first hand just how beneficial the postal service is, especially in rural areas such as east Londonderry. The Post Office provides local communities with a large range of services that would not be there unless you lived in a large town or city. The service is central to any rural environment, where people can be cut off and isolated from the rest of society. Royal

Mail is a lifeline to many people, especially those who are elderly and live in isolated areas. Maybe the only person they see from day to day is the postman or postwoman.

The decision to sell off and destroy the postal service is shameful, and that is what the reforms will do. It is ironic that the Government are prepared to do that to an organisation that has only worked to the benefit of the general public, while billions of taxpayers' money has been and still is being pumped into banks and bankers still receive large bonuses. It appears to me that those who are hard-working and deliver an actual public service will be penalised by these reforms.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way and for acknowledging the valuable contribution to rural communities that the Post Office workers give. In the light of today's report that social services and home helps are only able to provide 15 minutes, the additional familiar face of the postman is even more important with such a decrease in other public services.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McQuillan: Thank you. I could not agree more with the Member opposite. I agree with everything she said.

The universal service, along with universal fixed pricing across the United Kingdom, must be maintained for and by the public. It is a public service, and the public must therefore have a say. At the moment, it just appears to be the elite in London who are making the decision to suit their ideological standards. The privatisation of Royal Mail will have a tremendous impact on those living in some of the most rural and isolated parts of the United Kingdom; that is a fact. There is not enough money to sustain such a service if it is privatised. Such a service could be offered at an extensive cost that most people in rural areas on a low income would not be able to afford. If the Government can give us a guarantee that universal service, along with universal fixed pricing, will be maintained, that may cause us to look at it differently. However, they have not, which is why we are discussing it today. I know that Ofcom has said that the Government have given a commitment up until the end of their mandate, but that is not good enough for me, and I do not think we should accept it.

The Government may have announced their plans to sell off at the end of this year, but it is not too late for Ministers to pause and reconsider the damaging impact of the sale. My other worry is that this is a trial run for selling off the Post Office network, and we cannot let that happen. Indeed, we should encourage the increase of government services and make sure that post offices retain their central role in the provision of pensions and benefits. I want to make it very clear that the sell-off will cost jobs right across the Province.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. A few moments ago he asked why the Government were proceeding with the move to sell off Royal Mail. At the weekend there was a report in some of the financial press indicating that the price at which Royal Mail shares will probably be offered, even at the upper end of the price range, will probably underestimate the value of Royal Mail by as much £1 billion. Therefore, we see exactly why the Government are selling it off: it is an attempt to bring in punters at a lower price in order to get more of them on board the gravy train.

Mr McQuillan: I certainly agree with everything that my colleague from East Londonderry has said. It leads you to wonder why Royal Mail is being sold off. We in Northern Ireland do not have the advantage that the south-eastern parts of the mainland have, being densely populated areas where there is a huge economic advantage — hence it is affordable — as well as the ability of the private sector to turn a profit in order to maintain an existence.

For generations, Britain has prided itself on helping those in hardship and those at a disadvantage. The move to privatise Royal Mail will not only hit those unfortunate enough to be in such a position. I support the motion and ask the House to support it.

11.45 am

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin. I will speak in favour of the motion. I thank the proposer of the motion, who has articulated the points very well. I have to declare an interest: I worked in the postal service for a number of years, and I want to take the opportunity to thank the good people of Kingsmill, Whitecross, Ballymyre and Glenanne. I had the privilege of spending a few years on a rural run in my part of the constituency at that time. I know only too well the significance of the universal service obligation (USO) to people in rural areas.

I understand that, for business to grow and survive in today's climate, it must invest and modernise to meet the needs of an ever-growing technological age. The proposer of the motion mentioned that Royal Mail was a profitable company, with profits of over £400 million. In my time, I did not see very much investment in it. At its meeting last week, the CWU outlined how successful and profitable the company was. It is as if Royal Mail is being run down, instead of investing for the future. That is the point that union members were trying to make.

Most of my contribution will be on the USO and the impact that privatisation will have on the workers. Having been one of those workers, I know how privatisation will impact on the ground. I know that there are other Members present who have worked in the postal service.

I wish to talk about the rural areas. Without proper broadband provision or, in some cases, mobile phone coverage in remote rural areas, rural people and businesses are totally reliant on the telephone and a daily postal delivery to compete in the market. I am aware that many people travel to their nearest post office or sub-post office for transactions and everyday essentials, although not everyone is in a position to do that.

I will now concentrate on the universal service obligation. It says in the proposals that that will be protected for a period, and, at Question Time in Westminster, a Member said that the statute would not be changed unless it went before the House. However, clearly, somebody here is saying that there is another process that could be used to change the statute and the obligations — through the Committees. I would be very concerned if that were the case. Having spoken to some of the workers and to the CWU, I know that they have been told that jobs will be protected for three years and that there will be a 10-year agreement on postal service delivery and working with the Post Office network. I do not believe that that will be the case. If it were to be privatised, it would be cherry-picked,

and rural people would lose the six-days-a-week delivery. That is what would happen under privatisation. There is a proposal to go from six days to five, and I think that that would happen. Deliveries to rural people would be cut, there is no doubt about it. Having worked in the system and knowing how services are delivered in rural areas, I can say that there is no doubt that services would be cherry-picked. Even at present, the cost of getting parcels delivered is quite expensive. Some of the companies that undertake private delivery at the moment will not go to some remote rural areas. That is one element.

In the last few seconds, I want to talk about the other element. At the moment, there is a well-paid workforce in Royal Mail, and it has a very good work ethic and ethos in delivering services for the people. If there were privatisation, there would certainly be job losses. There is no doubt about that.

Mr Elliott: Coming from a very rural area of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I understand and appreciate, as do many other Members, the value of the services delivered by postmen, postwomen and all who deliver the mail. It is not just the delivery service but the wider community aspect that is important. I appreciate having the opportunity to have input to the debate.

I cannot talk specifically about staff, as I am not as aware as Members who have declared an interest as a former employee. It will clearly have a significant impact. I heard that at the union event held last week in this Building, at which members of staff clearly outlined the problems that they envisage for staff throughout the service.

I understand the service that is provided by the Post Office and by the system. To me, the privatisation is a reduction in the provision of service. I have looked at other aspects of government agencies that have been privatised over the past number of years, and I realise, first, that the cost of the service has significantly increased in many areas and, secondly — this is a personal opinion, and others can disagree if they so wish — there has been a reduction in the service provided by the agencies and organisations that have now become private. We must remember that, when an area like this is privatised, the shareholders are then in control of it, and they want to make money out of it. They drive the change and drive the profitability of it, and that is something that we need to be mindful of. Is that what this is about? Is it about driving profitability for businesses and private investors who want to increase their profits every year, whether that is personal profits or business profits?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He has just outlined an important point. It will probably be the case that, tomorrow or the day after, assuming that the process is completed, the Government will announce that hundreds of thousands or maybe even a couple of million people have applied for Royal Mail shares. The Government will then sell that as a huge success for working-class capitalism. What they do not tell us is that, within two or three years, it is inevitable that the small shareholder will sell out at a small 10% or 15% gain, and the hedge funds, the big boys and the city men and women will then take the decisions that affect the Royal Mail, not the one and a half or two million punters who buy in at the early stages.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Principal Deputy Speaker. I agree with Mr Campbell on that very point. We have seen that over and over again. It is not something new. We have experience of it from other organisations that have been privatised in this way, so we are very aware of it.

I have one major question: what other options have been considered? What have they tried to do internally in the postal service and Post Office to improve the service, to make it more efficient and to make it a better service for the wider community? I have been given no explanation of how they have tried to deliver on that or to change the system or to make the amendments that may help, first, the staff; secondly, the service; and, thirdly and most important, the consumer, the members of the general public who deserve the proper and efficient service that we all want to see.

I read in some of the notes from the Post Office that it is suggesting that the six-day postal deliveries will continue and will be part of the contract, but how long will that last? I recall when another service was privatised — BT — there was an indication that it would provide repairs and repair lines seven days a week. Now that does not happen. I know that, when your phone goes off, it will not come out and repair it at the weekends because it says that it is no longer an essential service and it does not have to do it. What I see here is the serious potential for a reduction in service, and, coming from the rural constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I believe that that will be very important, and it will be a downgrading of the entire community service that is provided here by the postal service.

Mr Lyttle: I support the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party and as the current chairperson of the recently established all-party Assembly group on postal issues. It has been established to consider the challenges and opportunities for postal issues here in Northern Ireland, and I am grateful to the Members who have shown their support for the group already, including the Deputy Chairperson, Pam Brown MLA. The all-party Assembly group on postal issues will hold two meetings next week, and I encourage MLAs to take that opportunity to meet key stakeholders around this important issue.

As many Members have said, Royal Mail postal services are absolutely vital on many levels. There is, of course, a need to continue to develop its business model and for investment, but it is not for the Government to sidestep their responsibility to make that investment. Although the public sector has a lot to learn from the private sector, it is just wrong to assume that the only solution to public sector reform is privatisation. It is welcome that the new Minister of Finance has set out an ambitious vision for public sector innovation in Northern Ireland.

The universal price and universal service — one price, six days a week, to anywhere in the UK — is vital to people across this community. It is a service for the people, and it should belong to the people. Although reassurances have been given that this vital service obligation would be protected under privatisation, it is a key concern whether that will be upheld outside public ownership. The Alliance Party, therefore, has consistently opposed the proposal.

I welcome the cross-party support on the issue. The Assembly will hopefully send out a united message today. It is also important for us to acknowledge openly that the

process is now at a very late stage. I emphasise, therefore, that stopping the process will require united and immediate action. I want to hear more about the action that parties have taken on the issue.

My colleague and Alliance Party MP for East Belfast, Naomi Long, opposed the UK Government legislation to privatise Royal Mail — the Postal Services Act 2011 — and has continued to work on the issue since. Naomi has made representations to the relevant UK Minister, Michael Fallon MP, stressing Alliance Party concerns about the potential impact of privatisation on isolated communities, older people, businesses, staff and the Post Office in Northern Ireland if the cost and availability of postal services cannot be protected. Minister Fallon's response has not convinced us, as a party, that privatisation is the best for cost of service and the availability of Royal Mail and postal services in Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party also has significant concerns about the potential consequences of privatisation for the Post Office network.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member acknowledge that SDLP MPs have also taken part in the debates at Westminster and opposed the sale?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention. I absolutely recognise that; it is in line with the need for cross-party, united action on the issue.

As I was saying, the Alliance Party also has significant concerns about the potential impact on the Post Office network, which is a separate business but relies heavily on mail services. It has not seen delivery from the Government on their commitment to make post offices more of a front office for government services across the UK. My colleague Naomi Long MP presented those concerns to the UK Government Under-Secretary of State for Employment Relations and Consumer Affairs, Jo Swinson. It is my understanding that the National Federation of SubPostmasters is also calling for the proposed privatisation to be stopped until a fuller appraisal of its potential impact on its services has been conducted.

We also heard that city experts have suggested that the Government may have undervalued the business by as much as £1 billion. It is a profitable business that made £440 million last year, which only adds to the perception and concern that the Government's proposals have been hastily hatched and badly judged. That was certainly the opinion of the CWU at a briefing in Parliament Buildings last week. It highlighted the possible impact on wages and conditions for workers in the postal industry, which should be another area of concern for the Assembly.

The united message that the Assembly will hopefully send out today will be welcome. The Alliance Party believes that retaining Royal Mail in public ownership will give taxpayers an ongoing direct interest in the maintenance of universal postal services, help to safeguard Royal Mail's vital link with the Post Office and ensure that taxpayers get to share in the modernisation and increased profits that Royal Mail delivers. The process is at a very late stage, but it is not complete. The Alliance Party has consistently supported postal services and adds its voice to the call of the Assembly on the UK Government to abandon this proposal and to make the investments and policy decisions necessary to maintain the Royal Mail and Post

Office network that is so vital to the life of so many in this community.

12.00 noon

Mr Storey: I, too, support the motion. It should not go unnoticed outside the confines of the Chamber that, in a very short space of time, the House has been able to come to a place where it has an agreed motion on an issue of great concern. Nor should it pass our gaze that both of these issues emanate from decisions that are being taken by the Government at Westminster. We will come on to that in a moment or two.

I welcome the fact that we are having a debate in the Chamber today for a number of reasons. First, we should not lose sight of the fact that Royal Mail has provided a service to the people of the United Kingdom for almost 500 years. While history and sentiment are all well and good, the concerns and fears of those employed by Royal Mail, in particular, need to be taken on board and seriously considered. We, as a local Assembly, should be concerned about any plan that changes the nature and the operational ability of our public service. The Member who has just spoken mentioned that the current Finance Minister has recently made some comments about that. The House is well aware that, if the Minister of Education were to approve proposals in the House, the public service would be affected in that we would see the loss of teachers from our schools. So, we should not be partial on this issue. We should ensure that, in every case where we value the public service that is being given, we take all possible steps to mitigate any long-term effects.

We also have a duty to raise the concerns of the staff of Royal Mail. The reasons have been set out very well and very clearly by its union. I commend its members for the briefing that we had last week in the House and for the work that they have done and the information that they have provided for us. If we look at the end-to-end service that is being provided currently by other providers in regions in the United Kingdom, we see that it is abundantly clear that those workers are not being treated in the way that we would like to see the current staff of Royal Mail being treated. There are zero-hours contracts, for instance, and there is a differential in pay outside the city of London and in other places. Clearly, there is a duty on us as public servants, as a legislature and as an Assembly to voice those concerns not only here but in the House of Commons.

That brings me to the comments that were made about what has been going on in the House of Commons. There have been a number of debates and questions. My party colleague and MP for South Antrim, Rev William McCrea, asked the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he could set out the safeguards to universal Royal Mail services in Northern Ireland. In April of this year, the Minister replied that the Government were committed to securing the future of the universal postal service provided by Royal Mail, which is so important to our communities, society and the economy. He went on to use as justification the Postal Services Act 2011. Does anybody believe that the Postal Services Act of 2011 is currently being delivered — excuse the pun — in a way that protects the service and those who deliver that service?

I see comments from the regulator, who has sent us correspondence over the past couple of days. We know

that there is a limit to how far they can go in interfering on this issue. So, despite the promises that have been made and the assurances that have been given, they are not being delivered, in reality.

Finally, I concur with the point made by my colleague from East Londonderry. We need to ensure that this is not the first step in an attack on the Post Office. If it is Royal Mail today, it could very easily be our post offices in the future, despite all the guarantees and promises. For those reasons and many others, I support the motion.

Mr Dallat: I will begin where Mr Storey left off. It is important to note that postal services were split into Royal Mail and the Post Office, which was the first step in organising the sale of the family heirlooms.

In the past few days we have seen what is happening. Well-intentioned people have been queuing up to buy shares for, say, £750, and we know that they can sell them in a couple of days' time for £1,000. That seems to be a handy profit, but let us think about it. What have they bought? They have bought shares in an organisation that they already own and for which they have paid money. Then, what do they do? They hand their shares over to the fat cats and the financial institutions for a paltry profit of £250. I am not against people investing in the Stock Exchange, but this is just about the most barefaced robbery I can think of.

The universal postal service has been with us since the days of the penny black stamp and the stagecoach which, a couple of hundred years ago, could deliver a letter to Dublin faster than, perhaps, it happens today, but that is a different issue.

Is this what we want? Do we want the postal service and Royal Mail to be handed over to people who are motivated entirely by greed; certainly not by the service that is provided to the public and most definitely not by the interests of the workers?

No one is against the modernisation of Royal Mail or the Post Office. It is interesting to note that it has been suggested that, some time in the future, the Post Office might be mutualised. That is a concept in cooperatives that I would not reject, but what was wrong with suggesting it for Royal Mail? Oh no; the opportunities for privatising Royal Mail are so lucrative that the concept of a cooperative was not even considered.

I was looking through the research documents which tell us that, according to the Postal Services Act 2011, the Post Office and Royal Mail would continue to be sister companies after Royal Mail is flogged off in a fire sale. Who really believes that kind of nonsense? Certainly, when the financial institutions get control of Royal Mail dare I say that it will be a case of the ugly sisters, with the fat cat investors posing as the fairy godmother.

This sale has particular consequences for the people of Northern Ireland, which is largely rural. Is anyone seriously trying to tell me that private enterprise motivated by profit is going to deliver mail to rural areas six days a week at a universal price? I think not.

Here, I must return to the future of the post offices, which of course are separate but, remember, are a sister of Royal Mail. Interestingly, a different route has been suggested, which I have covered. This is the work of a right-wing coalition Government that, down through the years, have

denied people their pension rights. That is really what it is all about.

I will refer to what my colleague Alex Attwood said a few minutes ago. The Assembly is going to have to stop sitting on its hands. It is going to have to stand up for itself and for the people of Northern Ireland. I do not think that there will be any disagreement across the Floor on this issue. Just as with the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) workers a couple of weeks ago, there is an opportunity now for us to say that this is not Birmingham, Manchester or London and that there are no real opportunities to make fat cat profits out of delivering mail in densely populated areas, because we are a rural community.

A simple solution might be to join up with An Post. We could paint the vans green. That would suit some people but cause palpitations in others. That is obviously not the solution, but the Assembly needs to speak up for those in Royal Mail.

Mr G Robinson: I support the motion, and I want to try to protect the jobs that I believe could be lost under privatisation. Any reduction in employment and service cannot be accepted, and would certainly not be of benefit to the community of Northern Ireland.

I want to acknowledge the sterling work that postal workers have done over many years, particularly the postmen and postwomen who provide an unstinting service, particularly to our elderly population in isolated areas. We all deeply appreciate the service that Royal Mail provides. Whether in our constituency offices or at home, it is, perhaps, a service that we take for granted. Only now, with privatisation looming, are we beginning to think of the impact that changes will have on our communities.

As a representative of a mainly rural constituency, I believe that it is essential to maintain the service that we have. Remember that the service has seen detrimental changes in recent years. What will happen to our rural post offices? I believe that there is a real possibility that they could all be lost, as private owners put profit before service.

We must also ask how privatisation will impact on postage costs. I believe that we could see a negative impact on the price of postage, denying generations who do not have access to e-mail or the skills or ability to easily stay in touch. Does a birthday e-mail have the same impact as a birthday card? For older generations, the answer is definitely no.

I am also concerned that a two-tier price structure could emerge in which those in rural areas may pay more for postage. There must be a system under privatisation that guarantees that the cost of posting a letter is the same in London, Glasgow, Cardiff, Ballykelly or Aghadowey. We must ensure price uniformity and equity of service.

Maintaining our current service and the daily delivery that is much looked forward to and depended on in isolated communities is the ultimate goal. Any form of privatisation will not guarantee that. We must also not overlook the possibility of additional costs to business. At a time when every penny counts, rises in postage can and will harm the viability of our local firms and will negatively impact on possible expansion and employment. That is not acceptable.

I urge all Members to support the motion and to support individuals and businesses in coming years by guaranteeing a first-class postal service for Northern

Ireland and the entire UK. I hope that we will see the same very welcome cross-party support for this motion as there was in the recent DVA jobs debate. We must protect this much-needed service in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister: Like other colleagues, I support the motion and the Royal Mail.

Several key issues come to mind when we look at this issue. First, there is the effect that the privatisation of Royal Mail might have in Northern Ireland.

Demographically, the way that we live in Northern Ireland is fairly spread out. Privatisation could also have a big effect on other parts of the country, particularly the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and the more remote parts of the north of England. We have witnessed similar issues when debating the provision of other services, including water and roads infrastructure. Indeed, per head of population, our roads network is two and half times longer than in other parts of the UK. Providing the same level of service will be very testing. Mr Robinson made the point about the cost of providing that service. Yes, it might be guaranteed for a certain time, but the cost of providing it will put it under serious stress.

12.15 pm

Northern Ireland has a population of between 1.7 million and 1.8 million. The size of the marketplace in Northern Ireland that the national Government is committing us to is very questionable, and the size and the locality of the rural setting of the marketplace would cause huge concerns about whether it is a viable way forward.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that there is an example that we need to pay attention to, which is the way in which the gas market was rolled out in Northern Ireland? You have access to the service only if you are near a large hub, because, as far as the companies are concerned, it is not financially viable to deliver that service to you. So, you are excluded, particularly in rural areas such as in my constituency of North Antrim.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I agree with the Member's point. We see that with other services. When farmers or landowners try to tap in and produce renewable energy, the cost of connection to the grid can be very problematic in more rural locations. He, like me, represents a large rural constituency. Of course the impact will be felt much more keenly in those areas.

Whether we like it or not, the Post Office and Royal Mail are inextricably linked. They might be separate in certain areas, but they are linked and do business together. There is provision for a 10-year guarantee for business, but we all know how quickly 10 years slip by. What happens to our post offices after that? With regard to Mr Storey's point, that will be most keenly felt in rural areas.

Many Members attended an event last week that was organised by the trade union. I warn the Government, and one of their own centre-right think tanks, the Bow Group, has been warning about the dangers of this and saying that it will have a huge impact in parts of rural England. That is why I warn the national Government that this is not the right way to proceed.

When you look at the amount of money that they are talking about raising, you see that it is not a huge sum of money bearing in mind the scale of our national finances. Nevertheless, we are going through all this turmoil and creating huge uncertainty about the future of the universal service delivery and how much it might cost in the longer term, and we are also creating huge uncertainty for our rural post offices in the longer term after the 10-year period runs out. It seems to be a very foolish and unwise way to proceed with this service when those services are all under pressure. Despite all the advances, many people still use those services. Very often, the only network that some of our older citizens use is the rural post office, and we could be endangering that very service in the years ahead. That would be a hugely retrograde step and something that we should guard against and do only when the evidence is there. The Government, quite clearly, have not made the case for it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank all who participated in the debate. There was unanimity across all the speeches, and tremendous support for the motion.

The motion was proposed by my colleague Alex Attwood. He began by apologising for the absence of his co-sponsor, Steven Agnew, who is out of the country but who, no doubt, supports what we are about today. He attended the union briefing last week — indeed, he hosted it.

Alex Attwood acknowledged the contribution of the trade unions to the debate and their willingness to look at new models of public ownership. He stated that the workforce was not simply opposing change but seeking the best possible model. He appealed to us to adopt the same spirit in this debate as was prevalent during the debate on the DVA issues last week.

He outlined five arguments in opposition to privatisation. He said that Royal Mail was more than a business and more than its workers — it was part of the very fabric of society, inclusive of people, encouraging business and trade, and providing services for those most isolated. He warned that we should change that model only after careful and proper consideration.

He said that Royal Mail as it exists is a good model of public service, which is working, showing profits of around £400 million and able to deal with all its pension contributions. He said that it is a successful and sustainable model. He outlined the reasons why the British Government are shaping the sale in this way. He said that the shares were being deliberately undervalued to attract big corporates to enable the Government to sell off the residue.

He asked what the service will look like when privatised. He said that we will probably see zero contract hours introduced, services cut, cherry-picking of services and the universal obligation compromised. He asked why the British Government were doing this and said that it was purely to balance their budget.

He investigated the effect that the change will have in Northern Ireland. He made the point that the character of Northern Ireland was different; that we live in a rural society with a dispersed population and need to maintain public services at the highest level to ensure that those in rural areas who are part of that dispersed population are not left out in the cold or isolated.

The second speaker was Adrian McQuillan. He is a former employee of Royal Mail. He also spoke strongly in favour of the motion. He said that the Government paper made a commitment to safeguard the universal obligation to a six-day postal service. He said that that was already being provided by the service, and that privatisation would in no way enhance that. He said that Royal Mail was a front line service, providing a wide range of services to the public. He said that it is a lifeline, as Mr Attwood also said, especially in rural areas, and he said that it was “shameful” to sell it off. He also warned about the impact that privatisation of Royal Mail might also have on post office services in future. Many other speakers reiterated that point.

Cathal Boylan, who is also a former employee, made the point that, rather than privatisation, further investment is needed in the Royal Mail for the future. He referred to rural areas. He said that many in Northern Ireland do not have an internet connection or mobile-phone signals, so for that reason, they depend more and more on postal services for communication. He also referred to the universal service obligation, which he was concerned about. He, too, thought that services would be cherry-picked in the future and that rural areas would be left wanting. He also mentioned that the people in the current workforce have good, well-paid jobs and that they work hard and provide an excellent service. However, he predicted that, under privatisation, there would be job losses.

Tom Elliott also spoke in support of the motion. He compared the proposed privatisation of Royal Mail with that of British Telecom. He said that, in that case, privatisation led to a reduction in service provision. He also said that, in the future, shareholders would be in control and would drive the profitability of the company and shape services to suit profitability, which would, no doubt, lead to a reduction in services.

Gregory Campbell intervened by making the point that smaller investors would gradually be squeezed out by the bigger, corporate investors. Tom Elliott asked what alternatives had been considered. He compared the situation with that of BT and mentioned the fact that, inevitably, services in those circumstances are downgraded.

Chris Lyttle also supported the motion. He said that Royal Mail services are vital on many different levels. He said that privatisation was not the only option to improve public companies. He was concerned about the universal service obligation. He asked what other parties, apart from Alliance, had done to stop privatisation. John Dallat answered him and said that Margaret Ritchie, MP for South Down, and Mark Durkan, MP for Foyle, have been to the fore in the campaign against privatisation.

Mr McQuillan: Will the Member give way?

Mr D Bradley: Yes.

Mr McQuillan: I want to clarify that and put it on record that the DUP also voted against privatisation at Westminster.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is good that, in fact, there is that unity of purpose in the debate.

Mr Storey also supported the motion. He welcomed the debate and the Assembly's concern. He said that valued

public services should be protected, and not just in the short term. Mr Dallat said that the Assembly should, in this case, stand up and be counted, just as it did in the debate on the DVA.

It is difficult to cover all the contributions, but I hope that I have given a flavour of most of them. I will conclude by, once again, thanking all Members for their support. George Robinson and John McCallister also spoke in the debate. Both emphasised their strong support for the motion.

I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly considers Royal Mail to be a vital public service; notes with concern the added costs to Northern Ireland businesses and consumers if the universal service obligation and uniform pricing are withdrawn as a result of privatisation, which could result in reductions in the wages of the lowest paid workers and other multiple negative impacts on prices, services and standards, including the future provision of rural postal services critical for isolated communities, the elderly and other rural dwellers; and calls on the coalition Government to abandon their proposals.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

Student Governors

1. Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline whether he intends to retain student governors in further education colleges. (AQT 181/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I thank the Member for his question. We are considering that in the round. We need to be conscious of student governance, alongside the wider governance issue in further education, particularly as colleges move to become multimillion-pound businesses. Student participation in the governance of colleges can be taken forward through a number of different approaches, including student representation on boards of governors. There are others aspects to it, such as sabbatical posts, which could be extended into the further education (FE) sector, and the creation of student councils. All those are under discussion, including with the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland.

Mr McKinney: Is it not important that boards of governors reflect a younger person's perspective? Will the Minister consider capacity building and training for students in that role to enable them to develop better governance skills?

Dr Farry: I am happy to consider the Member's point about capacity building. However, it is important to bear in mind that boards of governors are not simply there to represent a series of different sectoral interests and to try to fashion a common position from the different dynamics. Members of the boards are there as individuals who can take a collective view on what is in the best interests of not just their college but the sector and the Northern Ireland economy.

Teacher Training

2. Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given that he has appointed a team to review teacher education in Northern Ireland and his ambition for a more shared and integrated approach, which has merit, to explain why he has gone on a solo run on a shared and integrated outcome and whether he agrees that it would be better if this were coordinated in a comprehensive way with the Minister of Education. (AQT 182/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question, his interest and, indeed, his endorsement that there is merit in moving towards a more shared and integrated system.

We have appointed Pasi Sahlberg, who is an international figure, and four other individuals, all of whom have international standing, to take forward stage 2 of the teacher training review. In doing that, we have had discussions with my colleague the Minister of Education. He has clear responsibilities for the nature and content of teacher training and for setting the numbers. As the

Minister for Employment and Learning, my responsibility is to resource the different providers and institutions. The current situation is not sustainable. We have consulted on and discussed those different aspects, and we will continue to do so regularly.

Mr Attwood: I note that the Minister has not denied that he is on a solo run, but I will put that aside for a second.

Given that you say that you wish to have agreement on the future shape of teacher training in the North of Ireland, do you accept that you will not have reached the threshold of agreement that you aspire to if, at the end of the process, a teacher training college rightly decided that its autonomy, location and role are important and need to be protected?

Dr Farry: First, the Member should know well the nature of Ministers' relationships with and authority over their Departments and colleagues, because he was very keen to ensure that others in the Executive and the Assembly understood that point. I hope that he is not shifting his position as he moves to the Back Benches.

I assume that the Member is referring to the situation pertaining to St Mary's. Again, it is disappointing that the SDLP is taking a very particular approach by representing one particular institution rather than looking to the best interests of the entire sector and the future of the Northern Irish education system as a whole. The fundamental point in all of this is that whether you are talking about St Mary's or the system as a whole, it is not financially sustainable today, and that will continue to be the case. Therefore, we have to make some changes to ensure that we have an affordable system that provides teachers who are fit for a much more diverse and shared society, as we hopefully move in that direction.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Michael Copeland is not in his place.

Dress Code: Colleges and Universities

4. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what instruction is given to colleges and universities, which do not have a uniform, on what clothing is suitable. (AQT 184/11-15)

Dr Farry: The acoustics here are very weak, and I barely caught that, but I gather that the Member was asking about standards of dress in colleges. Those are matters of detail for the colleges themselves, and I suggest that the question is probably a prelude to discussing various symbols that might be associated with one section of the community or another. I stress that the colleges control that, but all the colleges have commitments on equality and good relations, which will be reflected in the manner in which they address issues that may cause tension in the workplace or the learning environment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members, it is useful to ensure that the microphone at your desk is pointed towards you. I know that Paul has made his adjustment now, but I say that for the benefit of other Members.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. He said that each college must put this in place. I thought that those directives came from the centre, because one college in my constituency gave an instruction about the wearing of football tops, yet no direction was given to another section

of the community that seems to feel that it is perfectly all right to attend college wearing GAA tops.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. If he wants to write to me with the specifics, I will happily take a look and raise those matters directly with the colleges concerned.

Colleges will be able to take advice from my Department or the Equality Commission, and the Member is right to say that we need a standard approach so that everyone understands the parameters and what behaviour is acceptable. However, in Northern Ireland, we are evolving away from talking about neutral workplaces where any notion or celebration of culture or identity is removed towards more shared workplaces where people can express opinions and their identity within different parameters. That has to be done in a carefully balanced way, and those are live debates across the sector. However, we will take on board any comments that the Member wants to direct to us.

Zero-hour Contracts

5. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is aware of the continuing problems faced by people who are in employment and to outline what discussions he has had with employers and trade unions about zero-hour contracts. (AQT 185/11-15)

Dr Farry: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I am conscious that this subject is on our formal list of questions for oral answer later, but I will proceed to address the question unless advised otherwise.

We are conscious of the issue of zero-hours contracts in Northern Ireland. Given the nature of the labour force survey and the sample size, it is not possible, at this stage, to give a reliable estimate of the number of zero-hours contracts in Northern Ireland, but our impression is that they are used less than in other parts of the United Kingdom. It has been said that universities are among the more common employers that use zero-hours contracts, but none of our universities in Northern Ireland uses zero-hours contracts. That is one snapshot from one sector that gives some meat to our suspicion that the problem is less serious here. We have commissioned research to try to get a firmer basis and are taking into account what is happening in other jurisdictions before we take any policy decisions on changes or legislative action in Northern Ireland.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I draw Members' attention to the fact that if it is very clear that a topical question is similar to one that is listed for oral answer, I will not in future call for an answer to that question, because if other Members from other parties have taken the trouble to lodge a question, we should have the courtesy to allow that to happen. In these circumstances, I am taking the opportunity to make it clear that, from now on, the Speakers will normally intervene to prevent that.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I understand and accept what you have said.

Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline what consideration he has given to the introduction of legislation, through the employment law review, to appropriately regulate the use of zero-hour contracts and protect the rights of workers?

Dr Farry: The issue is not, formally, part of the current public consultation that is under way and closes at the beginning of November. Nonetheless, we in Northern Ireland could take forward a free-standing consultation that could tie in to any future employment Bill that may come before the House. I stress that, given that this is a legislative matter, the House will need to take a decision on the way forward. We are looking closely at any policy changes that might happen in Great Britain. I think that the one area that people might zero in on — if I can use that term — as a cause of particular concern is exclusivity. There might be circumstances where a zero-hours contract benefits a person. Most concern, though, has been expressed around employers saying that a person on a zero-hours contract can work only for that one employer, which denies them other work opportunities. That has, perhaps, emerged as the single, strongest aspect where concern has been expressed, and we might come back to the House on that matter.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have received an apology from Michael Copeland, and I thank him for that. Mr Ross Hussey has also sent an apology and given an appropriate explanation. We will move on.

Mr Gardiner: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I am here.

Colleges: Courses

7. Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he takes to ensure the fair distribution of higher level courses across all campuses of our regional further education colleges. (AQT 187/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. We have six excellent FE colleges, as well as our universities. It is for the colleges to develop their own curricula and prospectuses on the courses that are available. On the particular issue of higher education in further education, we distribute what is, essentially, a maximum student number (MaSN) figure for further education. That changes each year, based on relative performance. The Member will note that, in recent years, we have been in the position of increasing the MaSN figure for the colleges across Northern Ireland. Indeed, there may well be additional future changes in that regard.

Part-time higher education falls outside MaSN, and that is an area of particular growth. We are committed to seriously increasing the number of foundation degrees that are offered in Northern Ireland, because they are of particular use in developing high-level vocational skills. Employers are central to the development of the curricula in that regard.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his response. Of the FE colleges' budget, 98% comes from the taxpayer. Given that fact, will the Minister investigate why the Newry campus of the Southern Regional College, with 32% of the catchment population, has 75% of higher education foundation enrolments, and Portadown and Lurgan, with 32% of the population, have only 25%?

Dr Farry: I understand the Member's point, and I am happy to address those issues with Brian Doran, the director of Southern Regional College. Ultimately, the decision on placing courses is for the colleges. They do so in reflecting demand and how they can best engage

with employers. To give one example of good practice: Southern Regional College has worked closely with Norbrook Laboratories in developing apprenticeships. The move now to have a level 4 apprenticeship is a clear sign of how colleges are working with employers to push the boundaries of what can be offered in the FE sector. That is something that is very much in the best interests of Northern Ireland. However, I will certainly reflect the Member's specific comments to the director.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends topical questions. We move to questions for oral answer.

2.15 pm

Colleges: Capital Investment

1. Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much capital investment the regional colleges have received over the past 10 years. (AQO 4734/11-15)

Dr Farry: We are back to the FE sector. Over the past 10 years, my Department's officials have been working closely with the colleges to oversee substantial levels of investment in their estates. The further education sector has been upgraded with a series of new, state-of-the-art campuses equipped with the latest technology and industry-standard equipment. That investment was crucial to enable further education colleges to support economic and workforce development as set out in the strategy, 'Further Education Means Business'. The investment has been delivered through conventional procurement and public-private partnerships. The focus remains the provision of a fit-for-purpose education estate that supports the delivery of a modern and dynamic curriculum and which delivers education and training that enhances the skills and employability of Northern Ireland's workforce.

A total of £262 million has been invested in the FE sector over the past 10 years. Major projects include: North West Regional College's refurbishments and newbuilds in Derry and Limavady; Belfast Metropolitan College's E3 campus at Springvale; South West College's campuses at Enniskillen and Cookstown; South Eastern Regional College's £4 million construction centre in Newtownards; Northern Regional College's £12 million campuses at Larne and Newtownabbey; and Southern Regional College's £4 million upgrade to its Newry west campus. The remainder of the budget was used across the sector to address health and safety deficiencies and to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

In addition to the departmental capital input, £124 million of private sector investment has been generated through public-private partnership projects in the FE sector. Those are the Belfast Metropolitan College's Titanic Quarter campus; South West College's campuses at Dungannon and Omagh; and the South Eastern Regional College's campuses at Lisburn, Newcastle, Ballynahinch and Downpatrick.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Does the Minister agree that the Southern Regional College has been under-represented in the allocation of capital investment over the past 10 years?

Dr Farry: The short answer is yes. We are looking forward to receiving business cases from the Southern Regional College very soon in relation to further investment. That relates to the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon areas. That is certainly a priority for me and my Department for further capital spend, and I hope to be in a position to make some announcements in the next months.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we continue, I inform Members that questions 9 and 14 have been withdrawn.

Mr Storey: The Minister will not be surprised that I want to raise the issue of the lack of capital investment in the Ballymoney and Ballymena campuses of the Northern Regional College. Will he tell the House when he believes he will be in receipt of a business case? Will he give the House an assurance that, in the outcome and outworkings of that business case, the Ballymoney campus will not be the sacrificial lamb to any proposals that would take the college out of the borough?

Dr Farry: I can reflect that the Northern Regional College area has not had the same level of capital investment as some parts of Northern Ireland in recent years. It is my intention to rectify that in future spending. We are expecting a business case from the college shortly to take forward a number of projects. That will include the Ballymena campus, as well as a revised proposal for the northern part of the college area. Obviously, Coleraine and Ballymoney are in the mix in that situation. I assure the Member that no decisions have been taken; we will see what is in the business case. I am happy to continue the discussions that I have had with the Member and his colleagues about future provision in the area. It is important that we find an outcome that works for the people of the area, rather than simply discussing one location or another. The ultimate prize is to ensure that we have skilled young people who are capable of taking up jobs in the local community.

Mr Kinahan: The Minister touched on this, but I would like him to be a bit more specific: will he outline how he is encouraging and facilitating collaboration between the regional colleges and the business community to support progression into business-related opportunities?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I draw attention to the fact that we are undertaking a major review of apprenticeships and a review of youth training. We want to ensure that what is happening with the FE sector in particular is relevant to the needs of the business community. Also, the foundation degrees that we are promoting as a Department are very much informed by the needs of employers. In that respect, they are different from the more traditional bachelor's degrees that are offered by universities and, to a small extent, the FE sector.

I also emphasise that we are going through the process of a revised further education strategy for Northern Ireland. FE Means Business, which is the current strategy, dates back to 2004. I am pleased to say that, on the back of that strategy, we have seen a major change in how the FE sector has been positioned vis-à-vis business. The purpose of our revised strategy will be to further consolidate that growth and make sure that the FE sector really is developing to its full potential for the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Allister: Given the deficit in the north Antrim provision, does the Minister have any comment to make about the fact that, year on year, his Department is spending over £8 million on educating over 4,000 students from the Republic of Ireland free of charge? Does the Minister not think that the Northern Ireland taxpayer might expect the priority to be to make provision for those whose parents pay their taxes in this jurisdiction rather than free provision for others?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It is an issue for not just the Northern Ireland taxpayer but the UK taxpayer, given the nature of the subvention that comes here. I am fully aware of the situation. It is worth drawing to the attention of the House that probably about three quarters of that spend derives from the Donegal-Derry corridor, which probably reflects the lack of equivalent FE provision in the north-west of the island. We are required under European Union directives to treat the citizens of other European Union jurisdictions as we would treat our own. We have no choice in that matter. We derive huge benefits from the European Union, so that goes with the territory.

The ultimate answer lies in encouraging the Republic of Ireland to invest in its own systems, particularly in the north-west region. Discussions, whether with the Education Minister or the Taoiseach, are ongoing on that matter.

Higher Education: Omagh

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the case for increased higher education provision in Omagh. (AQO 4735/11-15)

Dr Farry: South West College's allocation of full-time higher education places has increased from 186 in 2008-09 to 542 in 2013-14. That significant increase is the result of my Department's annual review of college allocations and the additional full-time places that I made available.

The review of each college's allocation is based on established, current and projected demand for higher education in each of the college areas and the colleges' alignment with the Department's strategic priorities. South West College has been the best performing provider of higher education and further education across a range of metrics, including the provision of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and foundation degrees. For that reason, in July 2013, I awarded 43 extra places exclusively for STEM foundation degrees at South West College. Following a request from the college, I have been able to give approval for an additional 25 places. That further demonstrates my commitment to increased places in higher education in the south-west.

My Department is committed to carrying out further reviews of college allocations in the future and to providing additional places when extra resources are identified. It is the responsibility of the senior management in the regional college to apply its allocation of full-time higher education places across campuses and curriculum areas, and, in doing so, to balance local demand and departmental priorities. However, my Department does not place a cap on part-time higher education places. Expansion of that provision, therefore, offers colleges another route to increase higher education opportunities.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the Minister's very positive response. I acknowledge that DEL has worked positively with and responded very well to the requirements of the FE college in Omagh and other campuses.

I ask the Minister to assess the case for the extension of higher-level apprenticeships to that area to encourage inward investors to show perhaps greater interest in Tyrone and Fermanagh west of the Bann.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question, and I am happy to confirm to him that South West College is already piloting for us a higher-level apprenticeship at level 4 in ICT and has just started a higher-level apprenticeship at level 4 in engineering. I should also say that Northern Regional College will join in the higher-level engineering apprenticeship. That is an indication of the direction of travel that we are trying to achieve with the wider review of apprenticeships. We want to see the apprenticeship model being extended to higher skill levels, and we believe that, as the skills profile of Northern Ireland needs to change to meet the differing needs of employers, apprenticeships offer a very attractive route for employers and for young people and, indeed, others. So, I am glad to say that South West College has been very proactive, and we have joined in partnership with it to facilitate that.

Mr Buchanan: Will the Minister agree that the lack of increased provision in Omagh is a huge hindrance to the excellent strides already being made by the college and, if not addressed, has the potential to cause detrimental consequences for future development?

Dr Farry: I stress to the Member that South West College is a very progressive college. It has been incredibly successful in what it has done. Indeed, it is now respected throughout the UK as being a STEM centre, so it has really established a strong track record in that regard. If there are particular issues about the allocation of courses and additional opportunities, I will certainly reflect that back to Malachy McAleer, the director. It is important to stress that higher education in FE is moving forward and is moving forward particularly well in the south-west area.

Mr Byrne: I very much welcome the Minister's statements on South West College. Are the Minister and the Department giving any consideration to establishing a rural university network? Perhaps South West College could be a hub for such a development.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He will probably be aware that project 10, as it is known, of our higher education strategy relates to how we can create better access to higher education for people who live in the more rural and remote areas of Northern Ireland. We are currently in a policy formulation area to see how best we can take that forward. It is important that we ensure that we have access, particularly for students who may well be accessing higher education on a part-time basis. We are giving active consideration to that, and, obviously, South West College would be a logical partner for us in that regard.

Community Family Support Programme

3. Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the community family support programme. (AQO 4736/11-15)

6. Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has for the expansion of the community family support programme. (AQO 4739/11-15)

Dr Farry: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will group questions 3 and 6, and I request an additional minute for the answer.

A pilot of the community family support programme, involving 44 families, has recently been completed. This has confirmed the effectiveness of the initiative, which has had a number of very positive outcomes: three parents have moved into employment; four young people have returned to school or entered training programmes; and a number of mothers are volunteering in the community. Following a competitive tendering process in September 2013, five lead organisations and a range of partners have been awarded contracts to deliver the upscaled programme to at least 720 families across Northern Ireland. This is part of the Delivering Social Change initiative under the Executive, and this phase of the programme will run from October 2013 to March 2015. The programme is now operational, and the new providers are in the process of recruiting families.

The programme will be delivered in five contract areas based on the health and social care trust areas. The main providers are the Upper Springfield Development Trust in the Belfast region; Network Personnel in the northern and southern regions; Dairy Farm Training and People 1st in the south-eastern region; and Customized Training Services in the western region. The initiative is designed to help families make life-changing decisions to enhance their prospects and become full participants in society. The programme will also support families with a high level of need to develop their capacity to reach their full potential. Families will receive help from professional support workers to enhance parenting and life skills. The 26-week programme will include a family learning component to address the health, social, economic, educational, employment and training issues that impact on their daily life. The programme will also support parents of young people not in employment, education or training — NEETs, as they are widely known — to re-engage with employment, education or training. In that way, it is hoped that they will help to prevent younger family members falling into the NEET category. Community family support programme providers will work in partnership with statutory agencies, such as the health and social care trusts and the Youth Justice Agency, to support families.

2.30 pm

Mr Lyttle: I wholeheartedly welcome the Minister's investment in families to ensure that our young people have equal opportunity for education, training and employment. What does the Minister think are the key factors to the success of this particular intervention?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I should stress that this is a good news story not just for my Department but for the Executive. It comes as part of a wider Delivering Social Change initiative that seeks to invest more in social programmes alongside economic programmes and, increasingly, to join the two up. In particular, it is a success because it works alongside other agencies. It is coordinated with the wider family support hubs that are also being taken forward with the Department of Health in the lead.

In working with families we adopt a whole-family solution. It is not simply about working directly with young people but about working with the whole family and looking to the underlying family dynamics that create problems. That is why we see solutions that benefit not just young people themselves in terms of improved outcomes but other family members. I have certainly been pleased at the feedback that we have received about that in some of the testimonials, including in the Member's constituency of East Belfast, where people have talked about their life being turned around by the initiative.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his response thus far. Minister, you mentioned that this is a good news story, and I certainly agree with you. Will an interim evaluation be carried out? This is the sort of scheme that Northern Ireland needs, and it is great news that 720 families will now be involved. It is something that we could extend in the future, and I am sure that there would be quite a lot of support in the Chamber for it.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and his endorsement of the programme. We are keen to see whether we can extend it further. Within the rules on procurement and taking into account our delivery partners' capacity, subject to additional resources being identified either in my Department or centrally, the programme could be upscaled further. Given that we are moving from a pilot of 44 to rolling the programme out across Northern Ireland and addressing 720 families, you can see the extent of the upscaling that we are doing. The programme has been in operation only since the beginning of 2013, so we are seeing remarkable and quick progress with it.

Mr McKinney: In the context of that reply, will you indicate whether the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has indicated whether funds from the social investment fund could be used to expand the programme?

Dr Farry: Financial support is coming from OFMDFM as part of the Delivering Social Change investment. Exactly how funds move around from one place to another is not something that I am qualified or in a position to answer, but it is fair to say that funding is being made available for it. We are not looking around for the resources. There has been a commitment, both from my Department to the pilot and from OFMDFM to the upscaling to date. We will have further discussions to see how we can upscale further. As we see real progress being made, the Executive and my Department will respond by ensuring that we get best value for the money that is available in Northern Ireland. That is not about keeping it in our own pockets; it is about spending it in the community and making a real difference.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. He indicated that the support programme was working with other statutory agencies. Will the Minister indicate whether it also works alongside the United Youth programme and whether he is in charge of that programme and its budget?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his searching question and the temptations that he puts in front of me. Let me say that the community family support programme is a free-standing initiative that predates United Youth and is separate from it. I have placed on record my initial concerns around United Youth. Discussions are proceeding behind the scenes between advisers and officials across the relevant Departments. A major design meeting will be held tomorrow morning to take

things further. There are issues with how we design the programme to ensure that it has the best impact for all the outcomes identified in the statement made by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in May. However, I am pleased to see that progress has been made.

Unemployment: West Belfast

4. Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on efforts to tackle youth unemployment in West Belfast. (AQO 4737/11-15)

Dr Farry: From April 2013 to date, the employment service has helped 375 young unemployed people from West Belfast to find employment. In addition, since I launched the youth employment scheme last September, 95 employers have signed agreements to participate in the scheme in West Belfast. To date, 331 positions have been advertised in the area, with 181 young people availing themselves of the scheme. Some 58 young people have also commenced temporary employment opportunities under the new First Start initiative, which was established as a direct response to the economic downturn and as part of the Northern Ireland Executive's economy and jobs initiative.

Steps to Work remains my Department's main adult return-to-work programme. It provides a wide range of assistance to help people find employment and is available to all age groups, including the 18 to 24 bracket. In addition, the Training for Success programme provides a guaranteed training place for all unemployed young people in the 16 to 17 age group.

Across West Belfast, employment service staff continue to work in partnership with Belfast City Council to deliver jobs and opportunities. They also collaborate with Libraries NI to deliver successful job clubs, which help young unemployed people address barriers to employment. With a total budget of more than £25 million, the Executive's Pathways to Success strategy is exploring new approaches to addressing the barriers faced by young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training. They include a collaboration and innovation fund; the local employment intermediary service (LEMIS); the community family support programme; the learner access and engagement pilot programme; and the education maintenance allowance (EMA) for young people participating in projects under the strategy.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo.

I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I appreciate all that information about the steps taken to provide youth opportunities. Does the Minister not agree that what is required in greatly deprived areas such as West Belfast are proper, paid, government-sponsored positions, offering real jobs rather than temporary placements for benefit payments?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. It really touches on the two angles from which we come to the issue of getting people into employment. We must invest in people's skills, particularly those of young people, and in the employability skills that enable people to search for a job and sustain one. Then we have the issue of how we create job opportunities that people can access. That

involves collaboration across a host of Departments. Ultimately, most job creation in Northern Ireland in future will be through the private sector. We already have a very large public sector. Although I do not suggest that that sector should be shrunk, we must nonetheless recognise that we have an imbalance, and it is through the growth of the private sector that we are likely to see the biggest leaps in employment opportunities over the coming years.

Mr Attwood: Can the Minister give his personal commitment, if not a cast-iron guarantee, that, when it comes to work programmes for those young people unemployed in West Belfast or any other constituency, he will not adopt the Tory proposals outlined by the Prime Minister last week, which see young people penalised by daily signing-on, questionable work activities and other punitive measures? Will you give a guarantee that, on your watch, you will not introduce such punitive measures against our young people?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, it is something that is of grave concern in the community and in the House. I do not believe that the proposals outlined make a terrible amount of sense. Even the notion of making people sign on every day becomes pointless and nugatory for the benefit that is derived. Other schemes come close to humiliating young people for not being able to access work. If we were to follow suit, there would be implications for additional staffing. That said, it is important that we study what is happening. If there are parity requirements, the Executive will need to make a judgement as to whether we want to breach parity because we feel that what is being put forward is inappropriate and we want to do something different. However, we will take that decision into account when we fully understand the implications and the financial aspect.

If something similar were to be adopted, two Departments would work in partnership. As the Member well knows, benefit conditionality is a matter for the Department for Social Development. That means that people have to fulfil certain conditions to get access to benefits. It would fall to my Department to take forward any additional programme. This was a major item of discussion at our Executive meeting last week, and further investigations are taking place. However, it is safe to say that, across the board in Northern Ireland, people do not see the relevance of the programme or how it makes a huge amount of sense. The Executive are stressing that we want to address unemployment through job creation and not through punishing those who find themselves unemployed.

Mr Spratt: Although the question referred specifically to West Belfast, youth unemployment is a major issue in other parts of the city — in South Belfast, which is my constituency, and, I suspect, in North Belfast and East Belfast. Will the Minister widen out the figures and statistics for West Belfast to the other constituencies?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I am happy to write to him with the full equivalent statistics for each of the four Belfast constituencies. The programmes that I outlined for West Belfast are available across Northern Ireland, which obviously includes all of Belfast. The Member is right to say that every constituency has to deal with unemployment and lack of skills, which is why we are making that commitment available. We are pleased that we have had a positive uptake for our schemes, but there is still a long journey. Overall, however, youth unemployment

in Northern Ireland is falling, and, although we still have a serious situation, compared with elsewhere in Europe we are in a more promising situation.

Management and Leadership Development Programme

5. Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's management and leadership development programme. (AQO 4738/11-15)

Dr Farry: In April 2013, I introduced a 100% funding arrangement across the suite of management and leadership programmes. It recognised the importance of management and leadership skills to the Northern Ireland economy and the difficulties that many companies here are experiencing in the current economic climate. The 100% funding arrangement will initially run to the end of March 2014.

Jointly with Invest Northern Ireland, the Department has developed an online diagnostic tool to identify and signpost available management and leadership development support. The leadership and management skills assessment tool then refers the user to relevant departmental and Invest NI events and programmes. The departmental programmes signposted by the tool are offered through my Department's management and leadership suite, which comprises the management analysis and planning programme, the management and leadership development programme and the INTRO graduate programme.

The management analysis and planning (MAP) programme addresses the overall management and leadership capabilities of a whole organisation through the completion of a diagnostic report by an independent business consultant. The management and leadership development programme offers a range of accredited interventions aimed at the individual manager. The INTRO graduate programme is an entry into management-level initiative designed to speed the development of graduate managers. The suite represents 29 separate interventions covering all management levels in microbusinesses, SMEs and social economy enterprises.

Since April 2013, 72 companies have signed up to the MAP programme, and 700 individual managers have signed up to the development programme. Almost £1.5 million of funding has been committed to Northern Ireland managers since April.

2.45 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We will start with topical questions.

Domiciliary Care

1. Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the recent comments by the British Minister with responsibility for care services, Norman Lamb, that 15 minutes of domiciliary care was, in

most cases, completely inappropriate, and the report by Leonard Cheshire Disability that stated that short visits simply do not allow enough time to deliver good quality care, whether he agrees that domiciliary care in the North of Ireland needs to be reviewed urgently, especially in the case of the elderly who rely most heavily on short care visits. (AQT 191/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Short care visits can meet the needs of elderly people. However, we should not look at 15 minutes of care three or four times a day as some sort of template that everyone has to work off. It can be the case, but that is not always the case.

In a single week in September, health and social care (HSC) trusts provided over 250,000 hours of domiciliary care with an average of 10.4 hours for each service user, which indicates visits of considerably more than the 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes may be suitable for some people because they do not need an increased level of care. However, it will be woefully inadequate for many others. We can do more on that front.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answer. I am not quite sure if he covered it, but I think that the question was whether he will conduct a review of the needs of the elderly in such circumstances. Can he give a percentage breakdown in respect of the current operation of 15-minute domiciliary care visits?

Mr Poots: The Member may not be aware that, last year, the Patient and Client Council published a report entitled 'Care at Home: Older People's Experiences of Domiciliary Care'. The Patient and Client Council is independent of the Department, and it found, in a survey on levels of satisfaction with quality of care at home, that 87% of people rated that care as good or very good. I am concerned about the other 13%. It is good that 87% think that the care is good or very good, but let us see where the failure is in respect of the other 13%.

Whether we need to carry out a review or look at how we can best meet the needs of people, including encouraging more people to take up the offer of direct finance, where they can choose their own time and the hours that people come in, there is a course of work to be done.

Suicide Prevention Strategy

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a timeline for the new suicide prevention strategy. (AQT 192/11-15)

Mr Poots: The suicide prevention strategy is a course of work that we have been looking at. We have made good progress. We had a very significant conference in Belfast last year, which gave us good information to work off. It is a course of work that we will continue. It is important that we continue to focus on suicide, because 300 suicides a year is far too many. We did not accept that death rate during the Troubles and we would not accept it on our roads, so why should we accept it with people taking their own lives?

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. In the absence of a strategy, how can he justify the current tender process?

Mr Poots: Work is ongoing. We spend just over £7 million a year on suicide prevention so that organisations like Lifeline can provide a 24/7 helpline service for members of the community. We have had experts over to look at the work that we are doing on suicide in Northern Ireland. They indicate that that work is cutting edge on a worldwide basis. Unfortunately, 300 suicides a year is far too high, but it could be much worse. Much of the work that has been done has reduced the levels of suicide from what might otherwise have been the case in Northern Ireland; that is something that we should look at.

Child Sexual Exploitation

3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following a recent Assembly debate on child sexual exploitation, to outline the terms of reference for the inquiry. (AQT 193/11-15)

Mr Poots: I do not have the terms of reference as yet. We are working on that. We will hopefully get to that point over the next few days and certainly over the next couple of weeks. I have indicated that I will bring the terms of reference before the House in the form of a statement.

Mr F McCann: How will the independent panel be selected?

Mr Poots: I have people who are currently scouring for a suitable person or persons to carry out that work. Independence is absolutely critical. Child sex abuse is a vile thing; an awful thing. I simply ask people to put themselves in the place of a victim of abuse, even for just 24 hours.

Equally, turning a blind eye to abuse is never right; it is a heartless and sickening thing to do. Where there is evidence of failings, whether in residential care or people's homes, it is incumbent on us to tell the police and the social services of child abuse that is taking place. It is incumbent on us to cooperate with those services. The public should not be in any doubt that there should be zero tolerance for any failure to report child abuse. That is why I met the Chief Constable yesterday. I indicated that the police had not done their job as well as they should have in taking the message to the public that there is zero tolerance for child abuse, and for those who cover it up. I am wholly opposed to any individual who would cover up child abuse. It is wrong, and it was wrong in Cardinal Daly's instance. I note that many of the Member's colleagues made comments in reference to Cardinal Daly. I challenge Martina Anderson, Martin McGuinness, Sue Ramsey, and others who called for the cardinal to go, to step up to the mark today.

Maternity Cover: Belfast Trust

4. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Belfast Trust has recruited cover for the two sexual health consultants who are on maternity leave and whether this has had any impact on waiting times. (AQT 194/11-15)

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. One applicant attended an interview and was offered a post as a locum. They were expected to start at the beginning of September. Unfortunately, they declined the offer because they were offered a post in the south of England. The trust re-advertised the post in May. Unfortunately, there were

no applications. Therefore, all the clinics are currently being delivered by the consultant in post, who is taking on additional activity.

Currently, there are four full-time consultants in the Belfast Trust and one part-time consultant in the South Eastern Trust. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) recently undertook a review of specialist sexual health services in Northern Ireland, which is due to be published in the near future.

Mr B McCrea: Can the Minister tell me whether he has sought any specific advice on the impact of the general lack of investment in sexual health and tackling sexually transmitted disease, and whether that is because he has a personal moral stance on the issue?

Mr Poots: Yes; I have a personal moral stance on the issue, which is that, if people are ill, they need help. That is something that all of us should take responsibility for, irrespective of someone's sexuality, colour, creed or religion. Healthcare in Northern Ireland is free at the point of need. By the way, I am proud of that moral stance.

It is really important that we look at and address sexual health. I welcome the fact that the RQIA is carrying out the work that it is doing. We should pay attention to its report. I think that there are opportunities for us to have a better sexual health service, including pregnancy advice, and so forth. There may be opportunities to bring those services together to do things in a more efficient and less stigmatised way. I am happy to look at all those issues.

Social Services Staff

5. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will join in praising the social services staff who have the responsibility for supporting our children, not least those children who are victims of sexual exploitation, and will he give those staff the support that they require. (AQT 195/11-15)

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. He is absolutely right. Many people who work in social services are put in extremely difficult circumstances and situations, and they do their best. They do not always get it right, but they do their best. It is important that people always do their best. That is why it is incumbent on us all not to allow these things to pass under our notice without doing our best. We should always ensure that children, who are our most valuable resource, receive the protection, care, support and help that they need.

Given the issues that are prevalent at the moment, I have to say that Áine Adams was let down by the RUC, by her uncle Gerry Adams and, to some extent, by the PSNI. I welcome the fact that there was a conviction in that case. I welcome the good work that was carried out by the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service in bringing Liam Adams to justice, but when it comes to the other issue of the cover-up of the crime, the PSNI has questions to answer. It needs to answer those questions publicly, and that is why the ombudsman needs to look at the PSNI's work to date. It was a very unusual set of circumstances. The PSNI should ask the ombudsman to look at its work. If it does not, I will. I will look for independence to be applied in this case so that no one — and I mean no one in the public — has any sense that anybody is above the law. I do not care —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: — whether it is a man in the street —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order, Minister.

Mr Poots: — a cardinal or a president; no one is above the law.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Minister that the question was about support for care workers. You are completely and absolutely off the topic.

Mr McGimpsey: The issue in question is a criminal offence, on which, I am sure the Minister will agree, this House must be resolute. When it comes to cross-border cooperation on health, it is an issue on which we should also expect Dáil Éireann to be resolute so that the two of us can present a common approach to this dreadful crime. Is it not unfortunate that the developments south of the border would appear to call into question that House's resolution to deal with this issue in partnership with us?

Mr Poots: I welcome the cooperation that we have had with the Republic of Ireland on child sexual crime in recent times. We had a major conference in Armagh that dealt with that issue. I want to ensure that there is maximum cooperation between us and the Republic of Ireland on this matter. Borders and walls should not stand in the way of protecting children. We must all stand together in the fight against those who would seek to cause harm to our children and young people. Whether they are in care homes or schools, outside care homes or schools or, indeed, in their own homes, we must ensure that we stand against those individuals who would cause them harm.

It is known — social services personnel will bear it out — that individuals who act against a child seldom do it to just one child. There is qualitative evidence to indicate that they will do it in multiples of cases, perhaps 75 times. So to know that someone is abusing a child and to not do anything about it leaves many other children to be the subject of that abuse.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends topical questions. We will now move on to questions for oral answer that have been listed for the Minister.

3.00 pm

Western Trust: Savings

1. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is required by health and social care trusts after recent correspondence indicated that the Western Health and Social Care Trust had to find £4.6m savings. (AQO 4749/11-15)

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question — if I can find it here. Apologies, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

A key objective for my Department and for health and social care organisations is to live within available resources, while also ensuring that services are delivered in a safe, sustainable and effective way. In that context, health and social care trusts are progressing work to assess the pressures that they are facing so that proposals can be agreed that will enable each trust to achieve financial break-even in 2013-14. The trusts' plans are in draft form as there continues to be focused and purposeful engagement between my Department, the Health

and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the trusts. Once agreement has been reached, the plans will be finalised for my consideration.

Mr McAleer: Can the Minister confirm the exact amount of savings that are to be found across all the trusts, and that this will be impact assessed?

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland has managed to live within its means in healthcare over the past number of years. We will seek to continue to do that. I found many of the things that were being proposed unacceptable, so that is something that we will give consideration to. I continue to have discussions with the Finance Minister in relation to monitoring rounds. Nobody should be under any doubt that health and social care is under considerable pressure to meet public expectations within its budgets. Transforming your Care will help the situation, but it will take time to roll out. Therefore, we need to continue to carry out necessary work to ensure that we get to the point where we can live within our means.

Mr P Ramsey: Further to the question regarding the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the savings, does the Minister appreciate that there is a unique situation in the north-west? The trust has increased costs due to the high proportion of agency and locum staff, as they are unable to attract and retain consultants. Will the Minister give us a view on how that unique and considerable position is appreciated and acknowledged?

Mr Poots: The Western Trust has many consultants who have been with it for a very long time. However, I accept that it can be more challenging in some services. When jobs are offered in the greater Belfast area, many consultants will take up those opportunities. We need to ensure that we can provide the correct level of service. For example, I know that the Western Trust desires to have at least one other consultant in its emergency departments. I see that as being of significant benefit.

One of the reasons why we were looking at a potential link-up with the Causeway Hospital was to create a more attractive proposition for consultants across those two sites, to enable them to have the skill-based quality of life that they could enjoy in a very nice part of the world, while maximising their skills in what the hospitals have to do and have to offer. We just have to continue to pursue that course of work. Obviously, many people desire to live in the north-west, so we need to provide them with healthcare in an appropriate way. We will continue to do that.

Mr Beggs: The original question was about the savings that the trusts are making. Does the Minister accept that, when health service staff are advising vulnerable families that their respite care is being cut in half, cuts are clearly being made? They are short-term cuts that will endanger the health and well-being and even the stability of some families who are caring 24/7.

Mr Poots: I am not sure whether the Member was listening or paying attention earlier, but it is clearly the case that we are providing more domiciliary care and more support to people than before. I would be concerned if people who needed that care were being told that they are not getting it. I encourage anybody, and any Member, who has issues on that front to raise those with the trusts, challenge them and ensure that they meet people's needs. That is what MLAs are there for: to support their constituents in these

times. If there is a case, the Member needs to make it very clear to the trust that it is not acceptable.

Mr Weir: Will the Minister outline the background to how the contingency plans from the trusts emerged?

Mr Poots: We have the finances, and the trusts are made aware of the savings that they have to put in place. At the end of the fourth month, in response to the emerging overall financial position, the Health and Social Care Board requested all trusts to provide contingency plans to include a detailed build-up of the factors leading to any projected deficit and to detail trust proposals to break even, including the potential impact on performance targets. In reference to the original question, those plans were received in late August.

The Health and Social Care Board and departmental staff reviewed the plans and noted a wide range of proposals that would be considered high risk for achievability and that would have a significant impact on performance and service resilience. The HSCB's conclusion and our conclusion was that those plans were unacceptable, as they would create service continuity concerns and impact on waiting lists and times for elective care and social care. The trusts were therefore asked to submit revised contingency plans on 27 September. Those plans are undergoing scrutiny by the Department and HSCB colleagues. So people need not get too perplexed about those plans as yet, because I do not intend to have our services diminished.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we move on, I notify Members that questions 3, 8 and 9 have been withdrawn.

Health Service

2. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why he has not legislated to protect the health service from privatisation, given that this proposal was endorsed by the Assembly earlier in the year following an SDLP motion. (AQO 4750/11-15)

Mr Poots: I set out my intentions in response to contributions to the debate on 28 May and again in response to Mr Kelly's question of 17 June. Those intentions have not changed. I will continue to use all the options that are available to me, including the independent sector, to drive down waiting lists and provide the best possible care for our citizens. I will not introduce legislation that would prevent me from responding in a flexible manner to any healthcare issues that might arise. Transforming Your Care set out a compelling case for changes to our health and social care system, and that has been widely accepted by those who work in the sector and by the community that they serve. We need to make the changes that are required to improve patient experience and care, and we need to do that in a transparent and sensitive way. I remain committed to doing so.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. Has he taken any advice from colleagues in other regions of the UK where privatisation has been introduced, given that it has generally considered to have been a failure there?

Mr Poots: The Member and I are on the same sheet. We have no intention of privatising the health service. On occasions, private services may be used. I suppose all of you will have used a general practitioner in your time.

General practitioners are private providers of healthcare services, and there is no drive to change that or to do away with it. I recall older people lying in beds in the long wards in the Royal Victoria Hospital and elsewhere getting geriatric care, but if you look at what is being offered to such people in private nursing homes today, you will see that they are in a considerably better place. So the private sector has a role. However, let me be abundantly clear about this: the principle of the health service is that it is free at the point of need to everyone who needs it. So no matter how rich or how poor you are, you can get that service. Let us ensure that that remains the case by ensuring that we have an efficient and flexible service that can respond to the demands and needs of the public while ensuring that we can live within our means. The most important thing here is that we continue to uphold the principle that the healthcare service is free at the point of need, which is something that I am wholly committed to.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline the cost if the Department were to take over full responsibility for the healthcare services that independent practitioners currently provide?

Mr Poots: For social care, 48% of spending is within the independent and voluntary sectors. The vast majority of residential and nursing care home services in Northern Ireland are provided by the independent and voluntary sectors. Through targeting additional funding in recent years, we have made a significant reduction in waiting lists and waiting times for assessment and treatment for elective care in the independent sector. In doing that, we spent around £53.7 million with independent sector providers, and that allowed us to procure 71,000 assessments and treatments. Was I not to reduce waiting times or was I to allow waiting times to creep up? It is about making sensible and rational decisions that ensure that we can provide good-quality care to those who need it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Ms Rosaleen McCorley is not in her place. I call Mr Adrian McQuillan.

Occupational Therapists

5. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions have been taken to improve the services provided to the community by occupational therapists. (AQO 4753/11-15)

Mr Poots: Occupational therapists use a variety of activities and equipment — for example, specialist seating and wheelchairs — and adaptations to enable recovery after illness or injury and to support independent living and health. A number of actions have been taken over the past few years to improve the services provided to the community by occupational therapists, including introducing direct access to the service. Access to community occupational therapy (OT) has been simplified so that patients and families can self-refer to it, as well as being referred by health and care professionals.

We developed standardised access criteria across Northern Ireland to ensure a consistent approach across trusts. The commissioning plan direction for 2013-14 includes a performance standard that, from April 2013, no patient will wait longer than nine weeks from referral to commencement of allied health professional treatment. I look to the Health and Social Care Board, working with the health and social care trusts, to ensure delivery against

that standard and, where that is not the case, to ensure that action is taken to bring performance back in line with the standard as quickly as possible.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. He mentioned nine weeks. Is that the recommended timescale for completion of the occupational therapy assessments for those seeking disabled facilities?

Mr Poots: We introduced the nine-week performance access standard for all patients being referred to community OT progressively. We moved from 26 weeks, which was an intolerable period, to 13 weeks, and now to nine weeks. The target includes those who are referred to community occupational therapy because they wish to apply for disabled facilities grants. Those grants are important to people who have a massive trauma, such as a stroke, that causes them to have those adaptations carried out quickly. Therefore, that is the timescale for the OT referral to be made, and actions will be carried out as quickly as possible thereafter to ensure that people receive the services that they so badly need.

Mr Copeland: Minister, several times during previous answers, you made reference to domiciliary care and the changes that that will bring. Do you agree that it also must cause us to re-examine and revitalise the role of reabling occupational therapists? How many additional occupational therapists have been employed since you became Minister?

Mr Poots: Reablement is critical. For example, it was far too easy for an elderly person who had a fall to end up in a residential care home. Reablement will often get those people back on their feet and allow them to resume a normal life. It may be that adaptations to a household can make all the difference for someone like that. Therefore, it is essential that we have the appropriate occupational health response. That is why we have set out to challenge the waiting time that used to be the case.

All MLAs will have come across someone needing adaptations but who were being confined and not able to have them done.

That is why we set out to reduce the 26-week wait to nine weeks. I appreciate greatly the support that I received from occupational therapists to achieve that. I work closely with allied health professional services and their representative bodies to identify their needs and the appropriate number of occupational therapists.

3.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I declare an interest as a former occupational therapist. Will the Minister commit to making a statement to the House, perhaps in the new year, on occupational therapy services in particular, outlining how that target has been reached and whether any further investment will go to occupational therapy, and refer to child development clinics, where there is substantial waiting time between an initial meeting with an occupational therapist and the commencement of treatment?

Mr Poots: When I became Health Minister, one of my earliest meetings was with a number of allied health professionals. They outlined the services that they can provide. It struck me immediately that those services can have a major impact on people's lives, perhaps reducing their need to go to hospital and to visit doctors

and consultants. Allied health professionals, across the range, provide excellent value for money. That is why we produced an allied health professionals strategy, and I believe that, as the trusts start to implement the strategy, it will lead to improved care. We should apply pressure on that to ensure that the trusts implement the strategy as fully as is practicable in each area.

Transforming Your Care

6. Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the nature and timeline of the further consultation on the revised strategic implementation plan for Transforming Your Care, which referred to "further consultation" regarding older people. (AQO 4754/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my statement to the House on 19 March 2013, I advised Members of the outcome of the consultation exercise on the proposals in 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' and confirmed that there would be no major service change without further specific consultation where appropriate. The Health and Social Care Board-led consultation on the criteria against which statutory residential homes will be evaluated is planned to take place between October 2013 and March 2014. The views of residents and their families will be central in the consideration of the future role of statutory residential homes for older people. There will be a further period of public consultation once the trusts have assessed statutory residential care provision against the final agreed criteria.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Following the chaos that ensued earlier this year with announcements from the trusts about residential care homes, will he assure us that he will ensure that that will not happen again? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Poots: It is very much in my interest to ensure that it does not happen again. When I heard that there was a proposal to close all the residential care homes, it came as a surprise to me. However, I have argued consistently that people are in a residential care home because there has been a needs assessment that has identified that those people need some form of support and care, which is why they have arrived in a residential care home. Therefore, I think that it is appropriate to look not at a facility but at an individual in a facility and support that person's needs. If that person's needs are best supported in the residential care home where he or she currently lives, we should seek to support them in that home.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be aware of my views on Westlands residential home. Will he outline what is being done in other parts of the United Kingdom on wider residential provision?

Mr Poots: The trusts have policies, and we see a different perspective between existing residents and the broader population. As we consider the issue, we need to separate out the group of individuals who are currently in care homes and are content there and the broader number who tell us, in consultation after consultation, that that is not the type of care that they want and that they want to be with their family. Some people who are currently in a care home want to remain there, and we need to respect their wishes.

Those who call for admissions to be permitted to all homes overestimate the demand for new admissions to the homes. In the entire Western Trust area, for example, throughout which admissions still freely occur, only 17 people were admitted to a statutory home over 2012-13. That is around a fifth of the older people who were placed in an independent care home, which was around 80%. So, even with some trusts not taking new admissions, there is a lot of capacity across the sectors. The new model of provision is not peculiar to Northern Ireland. Indeed, Northern Ireland has more statutory provision than the rest of the UK. In England, for example, over-65s cared for in residential homes account for around 8.3%, and, in Scotland, they account for 11.7%. No comparable data are available for Wales on the people in adult care homes or placement homes in local authorities.

Mr Kinahan: The Minister has refused to comment on the non-admission policy to statutory residential homes in some trusts such as the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, but does he not agree that continuing a non-admission policy makes the new consultation process meaningless? It seems that there is closure by stealth and that, after the public furore last time round, there is actually no change.

Mr Poots: It may be that, at the conclusion of the public consultation, they decide to remove that. That is something that people can discuss during the process. I should remind the Member that we are in a transitional period. We want to get to the point where older people who require more care are given more support in their home or in supported living facilities where they have more independence. That will mean some reduction in the provision of residential care, but we need to ensure that residential care, where that is necessary, is available for our elderly population. They must always be treated with respect.

Mr Dallat: I listened carefully to the Minister, and I am encouraged by what he said. He will understand that there is an emotive history of evictions and things like that. For the record, perhaps for the last time, will he give a guarantee that no elderly person will be forced from their present residential home and sent somewhere that they do not wish to go?

Mr Poots: It is not my intention to evict any elderly person who is currently in residential care. I want to ensure that all elderly people are treated with dignity and respect, that they are treated as adults in the decision-making process and that people do not talk down to them. We all have a vested interest in ensuring that we take care of the elderly because, all being well, we will be elderly ourselves some day, and we will want to be treated with the respect that I just outlined.

Marie Stopes

7. Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in bringing the Marie Stopes clinic within regulatory control and accountability requirements. (AQO 4755/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast was registered by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) on 5 July 2013, in accordance with the provisions of the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and related regulations. Having been

registered, the Marie Stopes International clinic in Belfast is subject to a minimum of one inspection a year by RQIA. In common with RQIA's procedures, additional inspections would be carried out if issues of concern were identified from an inspection. RQIA requires the clinic to have a written statement of purpose and patients' guide, and arrangements for regular review of those documents.

Inspection, prior to registration and annually, is against the Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The regulations cover the care and welfare of patients; the number, qualifications and experience of staff and their fitness to perform their work; professional practice; records; staff views; complaints; fitness of premises; financial viability; and notification of events. Inspection also covers areas such as the nature of the built environment; record keeping; employment and regulatory arrangements for staff; and the procurement, storage and dispensing of medicine.

Mr Allister: One year on, is it the case that, given the limitations of RQIA's role, neither the Minister nor the Assembly can know how many abortions have been carried out in the clinic, how many people have been referred to GB for late abortions and how much money the agency has made out of the killing of the unborn? Does the Minister agree that, if we had true accountability, we would know the answer to those questions and that it is a shame that the pro-abortion minority in the House has allowed that situation to continue?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It is for the Minister to decide how to respond, but a supplementary question should be a single question.

Mr Poots: I have raised a number of issues with officials about receiving statutory assurance that the law is being adhered to and that the RQIA is fulfilling its statutory duties. My officials are engaging with the RQIA on the matter. I want the maximum level of assurance, and I am looking at a range of powers.

The Member knows very well that this matter is dealt with under the criminal law. The Justice Minister indicated to the House that he would bring a paper to the Executive on ensuring that the law on abortion is upheld. I look forward to seeing that document, and I want it to be delivered to the Executive at the earliest possible opportunity. Many of us, rightly, opposed the fact that we had an organisation that had the ability to carry out these services in an unregulated way. I regard that as wholly unsatisfactory.

Mr Wells: Can the Minister update the House on the consultation on the guidance on the termination of pregnancy?

Mr Poots: I brought that matter to the Executive, and we have not yet received the detail of the responses. I regard abortion and termination of pregnancy as a very sensitive issue. For some people, a termination of pregnancy is the worst thing possible, and they are put in desperately difficult circumstances when they want to have a child but, for some reasons, on occasion, must have a termination. That is a devastating thing to happen to a couple who are expecting. Others think that termination of pregnancy can be used as a form of contraception; that is not what we are or should ever be about in Northern Ireland. There are many means of contraception, but termination of pregnancy should never be one. I read in one of the papers — I hope that it is not accurate — that there is a belief that

the law in England allows for termination on the basis of gender. I assure you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, that, when I was privileged to have my children, I was glad of every one of them, irrespective of whether they were a boy or a girl. It is despicable that that could ever be the case, and I will wholly resist that ever happening in Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his interesting answers. Can the Minister explain why there is such a delay in proposals from the Department of Justice on the issue? It seems to me that that is at the heart of the matter.

Mr Poots: I cannot speak for the Justice Minister or his Department, but I assure the Assembly that I will fully cooperate with the Justice Minister in bringing forward regulation that will ensure that the law as it stands in Northern Ireland is upheld in a Marie Stopes clinic or anywhere else. It is important that we have law that is applied fairly, appropriately and consistently, irrespective of where people happen to receive treatment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up for questions to the Minister.

Adjourned at 3.29 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 October 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Topical Questions

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have made enquiries and have been told that only the Speaker's Office can help me with this issue, which relates to topical questions. My understanding is that we are now on the sixth consecutive week in which there will be topical questions. I also understand that 10 names are drawn for each Department and that there are topical questions for two Departments each day, which, according to my maths, makes a total of 240.

So, I have two queries, and I am not suggesting any impropriety at all. Could your office tell me how many MLAs have submitted their names for consideration on each occasion that topical questions have been on the Order Paper and how many MLAs have yet to be on the Order Paper once for any of those 240 questions? Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I can supply those figures. The Business Office keeps the stats, whether they are for topical questions or questions for oral answer. This issue comes up from time to time. The Member will know that the system here is the same as that used in other institutions. Sometimes, the scientific nature of how this operates can be difficult to get your head around. I am happy to supply any Member with the stats that we have already compiled in the Business Office.

Matter of the Day

Murders and Security Alerts

Mr Speaker: Mr Tom Elliott has been given leave to make a statement on the recent murders and security alerts, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise in their places and continue to do so. I think that I probably repeat that statement more than any other in the House. Members must continually rise in their places if they want to be called. All other Members who are called will have up to three minutes to speak. I will take no points of order or interventions on this piece of business.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Business Office for approving the matter of the day and letting us make statements. It is unfortunate that we experienced two murders in 48 hours in Belfast and Londonderry in recent days.

The murder of Barry McCrory on Thursday was a huge setback for Londonderry, which, on the whole, has enjoyed a positive year, not least in its important role of hosting the United Kingdom City of Culture.

We also heard the awful news of the killing of Kevin Kearney in north Belfast. His body was found last Wednesday afternoon. The police described it as a "callous and cold-blooded murder". I and the Ulster Unionist Party wholeheartedly agree with that interpretation and definition. I and my party's sympathies and condolences go to the immediate and wider family of both men and, indeed, to the communities that they come from. Many of us have witnessed such cold-blooded murders since 1969.

We have also had a series of security alerts that have caused chaos across the country. Major traffic disruption followed a security alert this morning at the Blacks Road off-slip in west Belfast. I am sure that many in the House found difficulties with that disruption. I, for one, found it a difficult journey to Stormont. A suspicious object, later described by police as an "elaborate hoax" was discovered on the M1 on Saturday and caused huge traffic disruption. Last Monday, another security alert caused traffic disruption.

We do not want to go back to the past. Violence is wrong: it was wrong in the past and is wrong now. It should be equally condemned now as it should have been in the past. I hope that the Assembly unites against the violence. I hope that it unites against the current violence, as it should have done against past violence and murders. Having spent three hours trying to get to Stormont today because of security alerts, and having listened to the news over the past week, I am no more convinced about a united Ireland than I was before.

Mr Campbell: On behalf of my party, I join Mr Elliott in expressing outright and unequivocal condemnation of the events over the past three or four days. It would appear that there are people who have not yet got the message. We have to send out that clear message. First, we have to say to the families of those who were brutally murdered that our sympathies, prayers and concerns are with them, their loved ones and their friends.

Those who perpetrated the acts in Belfast and Londonderry simply do not seem to understand that such activity not only does not advance any cause but makes no difference. The people of Northern Ireland's views will be the same today as they were four days ago. If anything, determination not to yield in the face of terror will increase as a result and not diminish. Therefore, whatever cause they purport to represent — be it dissident republicanism, stopping drug dealing or whatever other cause anyone may try to say was being furthered in the act of killing anyone — will simply not succeed.

There are two issues that must be brought to bear. The first is that the police need to do all that they can. If they need extra resources or extra manpower, they must get them to deal with the problem. We will support the police in endeavouring to get those resources. In addition, the wider community need not just condemn the attacks and murders, although we welcome universal condemnation. Condemnation is better than condoning and better than carrying it out. However, it needs to go beyond condemnation. Condemnation does not result in people being put in prison. Condemnation does not bring charges against those who have perpetrated this. What brings charges, and hopefully convictions, is the evidence. What leads to evidence is information from the communities in which these people reside. That is why, hopefully, we will call, in a united and determined fashion, for the entire community to give all its information.

Further to that, I hope that all those who have any information whatsoever with respect to the Claudy bomb incident will supply it to the police in order to bring to justice those who carried out that atrocity, as well as more recent ones.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I think it important that messages go out from all the parties in the Assembly. The first message should be one of sympathy to the relatives, especially those of Kevin Kearney and Barry McCrory who were shot over the last number of days. I remember that, a year ago, in north Belfast, Danny McKay was killed. If I remember correctly, he was shot by the same group which is involved in the killing of Kevin Kearney; yet, we still have to bring to justice the killers of Danny McKay.

I am slightly disappointed in that there has also been violence against Jemma McGrath. It is worth mentioning that as a part of this matter.

Pseudo-republican groups use some sort of veneer to hide the fact that they are involved in drug dealing, extortion, and taking money or backhanders from drug dealers. They then decide that they should kill others whom they accuse of the same thing.

As Assistant Chief Constable Harris said to the Policing Board, criminality is endemic in the UVF in east Belfast. Indeed, it has been involved in violence and rape. It is worth mentioning that there must also be condemnation

of the violence that we have been watching over the summer. Within the ranks of these people, there are those involved in criminality. Information should come forward and it should be given to the PSNI. There should be no equivocation on any on that.

There is a responsibility on all political parties to stand up and speak, when possible with one voice, on all of this. The security alerts may seem to people to sit at a different level, but it is the same people who are involved in anti-community activity. Whether they are loyalist or republican, they need to get off the backs of the whole community.

Mr A Maginness: North Belfast is no stranger to violence and, in particular, political violence. I come to the House straight from the funeral of Kevin Kearney. I was in his house last night and I witnessed, at first hand, the destructive impact of violence on a family. It tears apart the family and the extended family. That grief and horror remain with me this morning in the aftermath of the funeral.

The IRA, whoever they are, have claimed Mr Kearney's death. They have no right to judge anybody, and they certainly have no right to kill anybody. One of the things that the family spoke to me of last night was their hurt, not just in relation to his death, but also in relation to the allegations associated with his life. The family believe that those allegations in the media and press generally are in some way an attempt to justify what happened to him. The family feels very hurt in this situation. We should take that into consideration and the media should take that into consideration.

I make no judgement on this man's life, but I do make a judgement on those who killed him. They have absolutely no right to take away any life. And no organisation, in the past or present, has any right to take away anybody's life.

That reminds us of our need to be constructive in our politics so that the destructive activities of these organisations, particularly this organisation, will not impact negatively on the stability of this institution, our politics and the sustaining of peace in this region. We should strengthen all our efforts to make our politics as constructive as possible in order to bring about the peace that the Kearney family deserve.

12.15 pm

Mr Ford: On behalf of my colleagues, I add our condemnation of the two murders that happened last week and express our sympathies to the families of Barry McCrory and Kevin Kearney. They were dreadful murders. Those who took their lives have no right to claim the right to do so. It is utterly bizarre that, last week, people claimed the right to carry out murders to deal with what they alleged were relatively minor crimes. The agencies of the state have the responsibility for dealing with such matters. No individual or small group has a right to take the law into their own hands in any such way.

As Mr Elliott highlighted, we have also witnessed a number of other serious events over the past week. We saw the attempted mortar attack on Strand Road police station in Londonderry. We saw a variety of attacks with hoax devices and devices of various sorts left in a way that caused disruption. One of those was targeted at my colleagues' East Belfast Alliance Party office, run by Naomi Long MP, Judith Cochrane and Chris Lyttle. All of those are attacks on this society as a whole. The latter was

very particularly an attack on the democratic process. That is why it is right that, this morning, we should be united in condemning such attacks.

As others have said, we also must encourage anyone who has any information that could assist the police to come forward and provide it. Whatever motivation is claimed by these thugs and terrorists, whether unionist or nationalist in background, they have no rights to take those actions. This Assembly is where the people of Northern Ireland decide their future; not thugs on the street. That has to be the message that goes out from all of us together. Let us ensure that that is the message, that we work together in a constructive way, and that we collectively provide the support that the police need. We should thank the Police Service and the army technical officers for the work that they have carried out in recent days. We should ensure that politics lives up to their work.

Mr Givan: It is right that the Assembly speaks with one voice and says very clearly that we stand for the rule of law, not the law of the jungle. That is what we have witnessed over the past week. Individuals have had their lives taken by those who are carrying out what is, in their mind, a form of vigilante summary justice. That is wrong. People should be brought before the courts. That is where judgement should be brought to bear, not at the barrel of a gun.

The disruption has been an attempt to take away from the good news for this community of the investment conference and the work that has been done. Obviously, there has been an attempt distract from that. I do not believe that it has but, nevertheless, it has provided a negative backdrop. This morning, people disrupted communities by leaving a vehicle, which led to a motorway being closed. Although some may think that that caused inconvenience to people, it causes more than that. In my constituency, where the traffic was blocked on the motorway in both directions, we have only a midwife-led unit; we do not have an acute A&E. When people need emergency treatment, they must go to Craigavon or the Royal. Therefore, lives are put in danger when motorways are closed. It is not something that people should take lightly.

It is right that we condemn violence from wherever it comes in our community, whether it is those who claim to be republicans, or those who disgrace the Union flag by carrying out any attack under the banner of loyalism. That is why I support last year's Lord Mayor of Belfast, Gavin Robinson, when he made it clear that the UVF needs to be taken on, particularly in east Belfast, where it is doing damage to the community. So, wherever it comes from, the violence needs to be condemned, the information needs to be provided to the authorities and people need to be brought before the courts, where proper justice can be administered to those individuals, who care little about our society. Let this place show that, although there are difficulties, we will keep working together to try to resolve those difficulties. I caution Members who talk up crises in our institutions to not feed the individuals who want to try to bring this place down.

Mr B McCrea: I wish to start by expressing my condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives.

Moving on, there is a danger that we are drifting back into the 1970s. When you hear of the deaths of people and the universal condemnation and about traffic disruption, all of

these things give a sense of an inevitable but unwelcome slide to the places where we do not want to go. Following on from the speech by my colleague Mr Givan, the issue is about more than platitudes. There is something of a danger of everyone uniting to condemn bad things when the real issue is about actions speaking louder than words. This Assembly, collectively, has a responsibility to defeat by its actions the men of violence and those who would drag us back. The most significant thing that I heard Mr Givan say, and I join with him, is that we have to take on paramilitaries from all sections, including specifically the UVF in east Belfast. There is no place for this type of organisation or this type of activity, because it will take Northern Ireland to a place that it does not want to go to. I join other Members in saying that we must unite against the threat of paramilitary violence from whatever corner.

Mr Allister: I join in condemning these recent horrendous murders. They, of course, are on a par with many such murders that we saw through the years, when those who thought that they were above the law, and, indeed, who asserted that they were the law in certain communities, thought that they could take unto themselves the right to summarily execute others. That was what we saw last week in this city and in the city of Londonderry. That was utterly wrong, just as it was utterly wrong when it happened in the past, under whatever aegis it happened.

It is quite clear that what was perpetrated in those two murders came right out of the Provo template of how you suppress your own community and show yourself to be feared in that community. That, of course, is something that we lived with for decades, courtesy of the Provisional IRA. These murders, following identically that template, are, sadly, on a par with them. They are no better and no worse and are equally hideous in every respect. Wherever the terrorism comes from — under whatever flag, loyalist or republican — it is utterly, utterly wrong.

The disruption that we have seen today and last week is, of course, also part of the template that we saw in the past, where the hoax bomb was used to bring disruption, to bring economic hurt and to starve and to create a reputation in respect of this Province, all to do it economic damage. I wonder how much the disruption this morning will cost our economy. I hear how readily the PSNI trips figures off its tongue about how much peaceful protest costs at Twaddell Avenue. I would like to know how much the protest of today cost this economy. Some people seem to be disinterested in that but very interested in what lawful protest might cost, courtesy of the absurd decisions of the Parades Commission.

I deplore the murders and deplore the destruction brought to this Province by those who ape those who did it in the past.

Mr McNarry: I had the pleasure and privilege on Friday to be in the Great Hall to meet and talk to delegates from across the world who had come to Northern Ireland at our invitation. That is the message that we here collectively need to send out, support and back. The message that we have for those whom we are talking about is quite clear and has been said by every Member who has spoken so far: there is no place for you or your likes in our society. That is the message that we are able to give because we are here.

Within that message, surely we are also acknowledging the choice for the public to decide. Is it not better that,

warts and all, and whatever disagreements we may have — I agree with Mr Givan that there is no crisis — we are able to be here and to stand up and speak against those who are trying to destroy what the people who came here on Friday were trying to contribute? That seems to me to be the best message. I am sure that during the day, as there have been over the weekend, there will be proper tributes to what happened on Friday and Thursday at those meetings about our economy and investment, and rightly so. The message has to be clear from here. No crocodile tears, Mr Speaker. Those people are an evil and need to be brought to book and to jail.

I will finish on this. It never ceases to amaze me the amount of people who bring so-called intelligence into this House or on to the airwaves and tell us that they know who they are. If they know who they are, why do not they not tell the right people to go and get them?

Mrs D Kelly: I want to be associated with the majority of contributions made in the House this afternoon. It is very important that we speak with a united voice in condemning such acts of violence. As Mr McCrea said, how we act and give political leadership in moving this society forward is more important. I also want to be associated with Mr Givan's comments in relation to the brutal shooting of Jemma McGrath in east Belfast by the UVF. It is long past the time that the police and others tackled those organisations and told it like it is.

We need to see a concerted effort from the community to assist the police, because we all know that the community is best placed, working alongside the police, to bring those people to justice. Therefore, I want to be associated with those calls for anyone with information to assist the police in their inquiries.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First of all, on behalf of Sinn Féin I send our condolences to the families of Kevin Kearney and Barry McCrory. Barry McCrory is a native of Derry city, and the family is known to me in city life. It is very important today that we are mindful that there are two families in the midst of a very grief-stricken situation. Kevin Kearney was interred this morning, and Barry McCrory's interment will take place in a short number of days.

It is very important that we bear that in mind. Too often, in these types of situation, the grief of families is relegated, as people run to microphones or the Assembly to indulge in "whataboutery".

12.30 pm

In Derry on Friday, when the people of the city stood together — I know that you were there, Mr Speaker — we sent a clear message. The underlying message was that there is no issue confronting our society that cannot be dealt with through peaceful and democratic means. Due process is in place, and, in the main, people value and adhere to that. It is very clear that people are cooperating with the PSNI on all aspects of crime that confront our community. We should send out that message today. I caution people who would come here and use these tragic deaths and the grief of the families to score very crass political points.

Ministerial Statement

Consumer Representation: Public Consultation

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to inform Members of my intention to launch a public consultation on the future delivery of consumer representation in Northern Ireland following a review of the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

The Executive, in their 2011-15 Budget, committed to undertake a review of arm's-length bodies to ensure that ministerial priorities and statutory commitments continue to be delivered in the most cost-effective manner. The review of the Consumer Council and the consultation on the future delivery of consumer representation in Northern Ireland are a continuation of the process of ensuring value for money in the use of public funds and the delivery of services to the Northern Ireland public.

In October 2012, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) commissioned an independent review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the council's consumer advocacy role in Northern Ireland is delivered by the most appropriate body or bodies, structured and positioned correctly within government or otherwise, operating efficiently and effectively, and fit for purpose in moving forward with the Executive's consumer and wider economic aims. The review took account of the changing consumer landscape in Great Britain and the views of a wide range of stakeholders. I am now in receipt of the report setting out the review's conclusions and its recommendations for the exercise of the consumer representation function in Northern Ireland.

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

The report recognises that the council has been responsive to consumers and effective as an organisation. However, it concludes that the political and consumer landscape has changed significantly since the General Consumer Council was created in 1985. The council was last reviewed in 1999. It is important that we periodically review public sector organisations to ensure that they continue to fulfil a need and that we take account of changed circumstances. We now have locally accountable government in Northern Ireland, post-devolution; the existence of numerous local and regional advice bodies; a Utility Regulator to protect consumer interests in the energy and water sectors; an effective Trading Standards Service for Northern Ireland; and much greater retail competition on the high street. In that context, the report concludes that the continued existence of the Consumer Council might no longer be essential to consumers or the most cost-effective mechanism for consumer representation in Northern Ireland. However, the report recognises that the council provides certain functions in relation to the regulated industries that are not currently exercised by another body but must continue to be exercised.

I have considered the report findings and now wish to consult on the most appropriate model for the delivery of consumer representation in Northern Ireland, recognising

the very different political and consumer context that we now enjoy. I am seeking views specifically on the following options: the continuation of the current Consumer Council model of an arm's-length body to represent consumers; the establishment of an independent consumer representative body outside government; or the abolition of the council and transfer of the consumer representation role, including the regulated industries role, to an existing non-government advice body or bodies. Consultees may, of course, identify other potential options for consideration by my Department. Members can access a copy of the consultation document and the review report on the DETI website. A copy has been made available in the Assembly Library.

I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I wish to place on record that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment provided a written response to the review on 31 May, and it is included in the Simpson report. In its response, the Committee said that it was content that the Consumer Council provides an effective and efficient service and that, to date, no concerns had been raised regarding the council's remit and structure. Essentially, if it ain't broke, why fix it?

In relation to the changed circumstances that the Minister referred to, there is one major changed circumstance that is affecting virtually all our constituents, and that is the recession, and I have to pay tribute to the role of the Consumer Council in regard to its work on many consumer-related issues ranging from banking and fuel to the most basic, and that is food. Mr Simpson's report, which was commissioned by her Department, recommends the virtual role of the Consumer Council being handed over to Citizens Advice. Will the Minister give us an assurance as to how much credence she will give to that report, and how much weight her Department will give in relation to the consultation exercise; in other words, that we are not going through a charade of a consultation and that the main driving agenda is the Simpson report?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Chair for his comments. The Committee engaged in writing with the Simpson review, and I am sure that that was taken into account in his work. As the Chair will know, and we have had the opportunity to briefly discuss the matter this morning, all the arm's-length bodies are subject to periodic efficiency and effectiveness reviews. As I said, the last one on the Consumer Council was carried out in 1999, so I felt that there was a need to have this review take place, and it will form part of my consideration — only part of my consideration — of where we go next. I am putting this out to as wide a consultation as possible. I look forward to hearing from consumer groups. I look forward to hearing from all the different stakeholders right across Northern Ireland as to not just how they interact with the Consumer Council, but in relation to effectiveness and efficiency, taking into account the changed political landscape and the changes that have occurred in the rest of the United Kingdom. So all those issues will have to be considered when I look at the final issues, which, I hope, will be around January 2014.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her statement. How does the Minister see the consultative role of the

Consumer Council on issues such as energy costs and water regulation being managed in the future?

Mrs Foster: That was one of the issues pointed out by Mr Simpson. He said that although there are now quite a few bodies dealing with consumer issues — the Chair has already mentioned Citizens Advice, and there are other bodies — the statutory role of the Consumer Council will have to continue in some manner or another. I would be very interested to hear from people who use the Consumer Council, particularly in relation to the statutory role on water or energy, to come forward with ideas as to whether they are happy with the way in which it is done at present, and if they are not, what other ways can we look at performing that statutory role. No matter what model is picked after the consultation, we still have to have that regulatory role fulfilled. Therefore, that is something that will continue regardless of what model we go for.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement and for providing the Chair and me with an advance copy of the report and for briefing us this morning on her statement. I agree with some of the findings of the consultant's report, particularly with regard to the lack of technical expertise in the Consumer Council, but does the Minister agree that there is a role for a government-funded body to challenge and scrutinise the Executive and the Assembly's policies on regulated affairs such as energy policy and fuel poverty?

Mrs Foster: The Consumer Council has often challenged not just my Department but the Department for Regional Development about those regulatory functions. That will continue, regardless of what model we choose after the consultation has finished. That must continue. We must have a body to bring forward complaints, particularly in relation to regulated industries. That is a legislative commitment, and, therefore, it has to continue. The big question for me, and indeed for the consultation, is whether the Consumer Council is the right body to take that forward into the future, given the changed landscape and all the other issues in the Simpson report.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for her statement. She refers to certain functions being carried out by the Consumer Council that need to be continued. How will that happen? Will she identify those functions?

Mrs Foster: Those are the functions that we have been talking about. In particular, there still needs to be regulatory functions for Northern Ireland Water. There still needs to be a regulatory function for all the energy matters that the Consumer Council has been dealing with to date. Those functions will have to continue, regardless of whether the Consumer Council is here.

The Chair, I think, made reference to the fact that Mr Simpson sees Citizens Advice as maybe being able to deal with those issues. I cannot be as dogmatic as that because, obviously, there will be procurement issues involved with anybody coming forward to provide those services. That is what the consultation is about. It is about identifying alternative models or whether the model that we have is doing the job well enough to continue with that job. I have been very clear that I am not recommending one option or the other. I am simply asking for views from the wider public not just on Mr Simpson's report but all the other issues that have been identified in the consultation.

Mr Lunn: I have not had the benefit of seeing the review report yet because, as of an hour ago, it was not available on the DETI website or in the Library. However, from the Minister's statement, I can see the general direction of travel. Is the Minister aware that the Scottish Parliament has done a similar and possibly more wide-ranging review and that its conclusion appears to be that a model very similar to the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland might be the way to go for Scotland?

Mrs Foster: I am aware of the work that has been undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. That consultation happened during the summer, so it was carried out concurrently with, or towards the end of, Mr Simpson's piece of work. That review is also in the context of an independent Scotland, so, as you can imagine, it is very heavily weighted in a particular way. It also goes much wider than the work of the current Consumer Council. It looks at the work that is carried out by other advice agencies in Northern Ireland. So although I am aware of that Scottish work, and I am sure that some consultees will want to draw it to my attention, we should be aware of the context in which it was carried out.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her statement. Given that the review took account of the changing consumer landscape in the rest of the UK, will there be an opportunity for her Department to scrutinise and investigate best practice models throughout Europe and the world?

Mrs Foster: In the terms of reference, we very much wanted Mr Simpson to look at the current operating context. Given the changing political atmosphere in the devolved region of Northern Ireland, we also wanted him to look at the other UK Government agencies, the other devolved Administrations and what was happening generally. There is a requirement for us to take that framework into account when we are looking at our consumer protection and consumer advocacy; that is what Mr Simpson has done in his report. As I said, other developments, particularly the Scottish Parliament's piece of work, will, no doubt, come up in the consultation responses. We will consider those as well.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she tell us the difference that she sees between options 1 and 2, which are mentioned in her statement?

12.45 pm

Mrs Foster: I will go back to my statement because I need to make sure that I am saying the right thing. Option 1 is the continuation of the current Consumer Council, which is an arm's-length body of my Department and, therefore, accountable to my Department. It gets its funding from my Department. Option 2 is the establishment of an independent consumer representative body, which would be completely outside of government. It might get government funding and it might be able to access other funding outside of government, which would, of course, be an advantage for that organisation. It would, of course, be completely independent from government and, therefore, not open to the allegation of being influenced by the fact that it is a departmental arm's-length body.

Mr McKinney: I note that the Minister's statement refers to how the Consumer Council has been responsive and effective. My colleague and Chair of the Committee also

referred to how it was viewed as an efficient organisation. I am sure that that passes some tests. I also understand that the organisation has helped to put £300,000 directly back into consumers' pockets in the past year. Is this really not about silencing the Consumer Council and, by extension, the consumer voice? In these times, should we not have a greater, rather than a diminished, consumer voice?

Mrs Foster: It is absolutely not about that. I explained the context for the review. The organisation has not been reviewed since 1999. It is incumbent upon Ministers to review their arm's-length bodies not only because it was pointed out in the 2011-15 Budget that it is something that every Minister should do but for very good practical reasons, such as testing their efficiency, effectiveness and value for money, and the changed political landscapes. So I completely and absolutely dispute that allegation.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Are there any financial implications in the consultation's remit?

Mrs Foster: I think that the work that Mr Simpson carried out cost in the region of £20,000. Obviously, costs will be associated with the consultation, because it may well be the case that we will go out and have workshops in connection with the consultation to engage with the wider public. Of course, officials will be engaged in that work as well. So there will be financial implications, but, as I have tried to make sure is the case throughout the review process, those will be kept to a minimum.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for her statement. The Minister said that she is seeking views on a body outside of government for the new role. Will, or should, that include a social enterprise model? Are there other social enterprise models of that character anywhere else in the world?

Mrs Foster: We are not being prescriptive about what will come along in the Consumer Council's place, if we decide to replace it. It may well be the case that we will want to look into the social enterprise model. Again, I am not being prescriptive in the consultation. I think that it is important that we are as open as we possibly can be. Obviously, there is the Simpson report, which people will want to consider, and they will also want to consider the overall changing consumer landscape in the United Kingdom. I think that it would be wrong for me to say, one way or the other, which I think is the best model moving forward.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her statement. I have not read the report yet, but I look forward to reading it. The Minister's reaction to Mr McKinney's question suggested to me that she was protesting too much. I know that the Minister might find this hard to take, but is she, in fact, adopting a neutral role in this? Is she awaiting a genuine consultation or is there a fixed view in the Department that the Consumer Council should go and that Citizens Advice should take its functions?

Mrs Foster: The reason why I threw my arms in the air, Mr Deputy Speaker, was because it is very difficult to win in this circumstance. If I had been lukewarm in response to Mr McKinney's question, I would have been told that I had an answer that I was keeping back. Given that I was robust in saying that this was not politically motivated, I am told that I have been over-robust in the answer. The Member knows that I am a pretty straightforward kind of person. If I had had a choice as to what I preferred, I would have said

it in the consultation. I am being as open as I possibly can be on this consultation, and I can say no more.

Mr Allister: How will oversight of the Utility Regulator evolve? At present, it seems that there are no structures to allow the regulator to report to the Minister's Department. Therefore, we have difficulties with, for example, who oversees the overseer when it comes to whether NIE and the system operator for Northern Ireland are keeping their licence conditions. Where is the oversight of the Utility Regulator going?

Mrs Foster: The Member has raised the issue with me on a number of occasions. To be clear, the Utility Regulator is funded by the Department of Finance and Personnel but is not an arm's-length body; it is entirely independent and is responsible not to a Department but to the Assembly only. The Assembly is the only place that holds the Utility Regulator to account. That is right, because the regulator should not be open to influence by any Department or, indeed, any Minister, because it deals with issues that should be completely independent.

If the Member wishes me to look at the matter along with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, I am quite content to do so. However, it is really a matter for him, because he funds the Utility Regulator, not me.

Executive Committee Business

Intellectual Property Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in clause 13 of the Intellectual Property Bill, as introduced in the House of Lords on 9 May 2013, dealing with the offence of unauthorised copying etc, of design in the course of business, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The motion deals with the proposed enforcement arrangements in Northern Ireland for two new offences to be introduced by the Intellectual Property Bill. The offences concern the deliberate copying in the course of business of a registered design. The subject of intellectual property is a reserved matter. However, the Bill's proposed enforcement regime for Northern Ireland involves a change to the functions of my Department, which is a devolution matter under Assembly Standing Orders.

The purpose of the Intellectual Property Bill is to strengthen the protection afforded to the owners of intellectual property. One of the statutes amended by the Bill is the Registered Designs Act 1949. The proposed amendments to that Act would create a new criminal offence for the deliberate copying of a UK- or European Union-registered design and a related offence for anyone dealing in such products in the course of business.

The new offences will augment the existing protection for owners of registered designs that is available through the civil courts. They will also align the protection regime for such owners with that for owners of other types of intellectual property — namely, copyright and patent owners — where criminal sanctions already exist.

Under the Bill, it is proposed that in Great Britain, local weights and measures authorities will have powers to take enforcement action against those suspected of having committed either offence. The proposed enforcement powers for local authorities in GB are in line with the powers that they already have for existing intellectual property offences.

In Northern Ireland, my Department, through the Trading Standards Service, has the enforcement role for the criminal offences for copyright and patent infringement, mirroring the role of its counterparts in Great Britain. Given my Department's existing role in protecting intellectual property rights, it is appropriate that it should take on the proposed powers in the Intellectual Property Bill. The powers to investigate alleged offences under the Bill are those contained in sections 27 and 28 of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. Those are the same powers that are already in use for copyright and patent infringement.

It is important for Northern Ireland that the Assembly pass the legislative consent motion (LCM), as it will allow my Department to help to protect the rights of existing registered design owners and ensure that such owners will have the same level of protection as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. This strengthening of the protection for registered design owners will help to encourage businesses to innovate in the design field, in the

knowledge that they are more likely to be able to protect their rights to such designs.

In the consultation that led to the Bill, design-owning businesses confirmed that enforcing their rights could be very time-consuming and costly and that it diverted resources that could otherwise be put towards business development. That can deter them from pursuing legitimate claims and can affect their willingness or ability to innovate.

The majority of respondents to the consultation agreed with the introduction of criminal sanctions for the deliberate copying of registered designs. It received support from small businesses, independent designers and the legal profession. Respondents said that it was rare to experience inadvertent copying and felt certain that design infringement was blatant and deliberate. It was felt that criminal sanctions would level the playing field between small and large organisations.

My officials in the Trading Standards Service consider that they will be able to take on the enforcement role of the new offences without the need for extra staffing resources or any other costs. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. Thanks very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for the introduction of the Intellectual Property Bill LCM.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment considered correspondence from the Minister, which outlined the proposals and the need for a legislative consent motion, at its meeting on 20 June. Initially, there seemed to be some confusion over whether a legislative consent motion was required. The Westminster Minister's position was that, as intellectual property is a reserved matter, the LCM would not be required.

The Committee considered further correspondence on the matter at its meeting on 4 July, which outlined in greater detail the reasons why the Department considered an LCM necessary. The Committee agreed with the Department's view that, as the proposal will change the enforcement functions of the Department under the Registered Designs Act 1949, a legislative consent motion is required.

The Committee further considered the proposals at its meeting on 19 September. Some concerns were expressed that there may be scope within the Intellectual Property Bill for some large multinational companies to avoid corporation tax. However, the Committee received assurances from the Department and Assembly's Research and Information Service that there is no evidence that that might be the case. On that basis, the Committee agreed to support the proposals.

Mr Dunne: I support the legislative consent motion that is before us. It is imperative that we do all in our power to support and protect the interests of businesses. Intellectual property is an important matter and this will allow the system to operate more effectively and efficiently with increased legal certainty.

During the consultation, the majority of respondents agreed that enforcing their rights can be a very costly exercise, and the enforcement measure proposed in the Bill will provide them with more support and protection. I

welcome the motion and trust that it will be of assistance to the business community.

Mr Kinahan: We have heard from the Minister and others that the purpose of the legislative consent motion is to ensure that the new pre-publication freedom of information exemption is extended to Northern Ireland. I congratulate the Minister for doing so. We know that freedom of information is a reserved matter, and because this issue has been taken forward in the Intellectual Property Bill in Westminster, an LCM is necessary.

It is fundamental that we offer sufficient protection to research information. Although the Freedom of information Act provides for a number of exemptions, this further exemption closes a loophole and is to be welcomed.

We must take all reasonable steps to ensure that we create the right environment for international research to take place. We must also ensure that we do not fall further behind the rest of the UK. We all want to see Northern Ireland as the leading part of the UK and, in fact, leading in Europe. Northern Ireland had the lowest number of patents applied for and granted of any UK region in 2010 and 2011. Those are worrying statistics, as they are important indicators of how well our economy is innovating. So there is much work still to be done in that area.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the legislative consent motion and trusts that the Minister will take further action to improve Northern Ireland's performance regarding intellectual property.

1.00 pm

Mrs Foster: I thank the Members who contributed. Enforcement is not a reserved matter, which is why this issue came forward. It is right that we should air the issues in Committee and on the Floor of the House. Therefore, I thank members of the Executive and of the Committee for considering the matter positively.

Questions were asked about corporation tax and the possibility of avoidance, but the provisions of the Bill are not aimed at addressing any taxation issues. The Bill seeks to raise the level of protection, particularly for small businesses. I commend Mr Kinahan's comments on the need to send out a very positive message that Northern Ireland is open for business and that, if people have design rights, they will not be abused. Knowing that rights will be better protected in the UK framework will make the economy more likely to innovate and create new designs. I commend the motion to the Assembly and thank Members for their support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in clause 13 of the Intellectual Property Bill, as introduced in the House of Lords on 9 May 2013, dealing with the offence of unauthorised copying etc, of design in the course of business, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a moment while we wait for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As you know, the Minister is on his way to the Building. I think that, given the incredible pressure that the Minister has been under with business over this past week and the many and various difficult issues that he is facing as we speak —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not believe that that is a point of order. It is more to do with filibustering.

The Minister of Health is not in his place. I propose to suspend the sitting by leave of the Assembly for five minutes.

The sitting was suspended at 1.06 pm and resumed at 1.08 pm.

Committee Business

Local Government Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 20 February 2014, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Local Government Bill [NIA Bill 28/11-15].

On Tuesday 1 October 2013, the Assembly referred the Local Government Bill to the Committee for the Environment for scrutiny. The Bill will provide the legislative basis for the reform of local government, including statutory governance arrangements, an ethical standards regime, council-led community planning, and the transfer of staff, assets and liabilities to the new councils.

The Committee has already agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals and, in addition to signposting notices in the local press, stakeholders have been contacted directly. A number have already indicated their intention to respond to the Committee's request for evidence.

The Environment Committee firmly believes that it is essential that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on this Bill. It is a huge Bill, not just in terms of the number of its clauses and schedules, but in its enormous significance for local government. We need to give it the scrutiny that it deserves.

The Committee's public call for evidence does not close until 12 November 2013, and we anticipate a high volume of submissions. After considering these, the Committee plans to invite respondents to take part in a stakeholder event so that members have a wide opportunity to explore the views that are expressed. The Committee will also wish to bring its concerns to the Department for its response.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Committee believes that it is essential that it is afforded the time to fully exercise its scrutiny powers in relation to this lengthy and highly significant piece of legislation. I ask, therefore, that the House supports the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Local Government Bill to 20 February 2014. I can assure Members, following discussions with the Department, that this extended date will not delay the progress of the legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 20 February 2014, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Local Government Bill [NIA Bill 28/11-15].

Private Members' Business

Public Consultation

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The next item on the Order Paper is a motion on public consultation. 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 speakers will have five minutes.

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that public consultation is an important component of government policy formulation and decision-making; recognises that it can strengthen links between government and the public and, particularly, the community and voluntary sector; expresses concern at the disparity in costs associated with consultation across government Departments; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to define best practice.

It is my pleasure to move the motion. Let me begin by declaring, I suppose, a form of interest in public consultations because, in a previous career, I profited from them. On a number of occasions, a Department or, more likely, an arm's-length body — or a quango or non-departmental public body (NDPB), if you prefer — would contract my services as a facilitator of public meetings. In my world, it was a very profitable little line of work. However, there came a moment when I concluded that it could not possibly be deemed a profitable way to consult people. That moment came at the end of a consultation process that had been run by a government agency. I will not name it, because that would not be fair. What it did was all done in good faith, was very well organised and followed all published guidelines. However, at the final meeting in the series, which was in a fairly rurally based hotel, around halfway through our by now well-oiled presentation and consultation process, two women in the front row, who had arrived together, glanced at each other and left together. At that point, there were more of us consulting than there were members of the public being consulted.

The costs simply do not add up. There was not just the fee for the likes of me, but the hire of the room in the hotel, advertising in the local press, PR, marketing, mileage and £2.50 per cup of hotel tea and coffee. It just does not make economic sense. Yet the Government continue to do it.

1.15 pm

Of all the public consultations over the past six years since devolution was restored in 2007, one of the most expensive was on the proposal for a programme on cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI). Again, I have no grumble with the idea that proportionate resources should be devoted to a proposal that is designed to impact on every citizen in the country. The problem is that almost nobody — well under 1% of the population — turned up for the public consultation meetings.

Worse than that, the sponsor Department, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), employed a consultant in the role of a peer reviewer to review other consultants employed by OFMDFM, and the

peer reviewer came to the conclusion that the document that was sent out was not fit for purpose. In fact, she said that if it had been down to her, she would not have allowed it out of her office, yet it was allowed out to consultation with a cost to the taxpayer of £93,185.70. Money well spent? I suggest not, not least because CSI is now gone and has been replaced by Together: Building a United Community.

On the question of costs, I turn to the concern articulated in the motion regarding the disparity in the costs of consultation. I offer one example of that disparity. Having reviewed the published lists of consultations since 2007, I think that there is one glaring example. I admit to a little bias in this because I am passionate about education, so I make no apology for highlighting two consultation processes run by the Department of Education.

In the same year — 2008 — the Department consulted on two important areas: Irish-medium education and a review of literacy and numeracy. Irish-medium education may not mean much to me, but the 1998 Belfast Agreement states that it is important and gives certain assurances on it. I have no difficulty with the Education Minister consulting on its future, but if Irish-medium education is important to some, how much more are literacy and numeracy key issues for others?

I offer you two quotes from as recently as last Friday. Speaking at Titanic Belfast during the investment conference, Prime Minister David Cameron, in his salesman mode, praised the fact that we use:

"English as the global language of business".

At the same event, our First Minister, Peter Robinson, reminded the audience that our Executive put the economy as their primary concern.

So clearly, numeracy and literacy in the English language are key to our economic development. Why is it, then, that the Department of Education spent over twice as much — £46,447 against £22,827 — consulting on Irish-medium education as it did on numeracy and literacy? I know, and Members will recall, that the Minister of Education commented in a news release on that disparity in spending, but frankly, he protested too much. He claimed that it was flawed logic to suggest that he was not focusing enough on literacy and numeracy. Of course, that was before last week's revelation from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which, unfortunately for him, reviewed literacy and numeracy in the industrialised world and found that, for numeracy, our young rank eighteenth out of 24. I suspect that we are probably in the top two for Irish-medium education.

There must be a better way. I am sure that there are Members who are waiting for their chance to point out to me that, in calling for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to define best practice, I am in some way ignorant of the fact that there are several documents on that very subject, some published by OFMDFM. I say to those Members that I am well aware of the guidelines. In fact, I am taken with 'A Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland'. I will make two specific points and then a general point about that.

My first specific point is that there is no mention of the use of the internet and social media as a means of consulting the public. Yet all of us, or at least many of us, are aware

of the power of Twitter, Facebook and all the rest to reach citizens who do not watch, listen to or read about politics.

My second point is that the document makes it clear:

"The Civic Forum is keen to engage with the administration".

I suggest that an update to the practical guide might be useful.

My general point is that guidelines are not rules, and neither guidelines nor rules necessarily define best practice. Experience is the missing element. Guidelines or rules plus experience make best practice. So, I call on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider what represents best practice.

We can all agree that consultation is a good thing in principle, and we can all agree, if we are being honest, that there are things that we do not know. So, we should all agree that there is a huge value in reaching out to those who know the things that we do not. But what is the best way? On a case-by-case basis, how do we identify the people with the legitimacy to help us do what, I hope, all of us in this Chamber want to do, which is to make life better for our citizens? However, that is glib, because there is no tension there, and we need the tension between the politician whose desire is to make changes and, if I may say so, the instincts of the officials who 'Yes Minister'-like may pull in the other direction. It is representative democracy versus consultative democracy.

I hope that Members will join me in supporting the motion because I believe passionately that consultation is critical. Listening must be the foundation of a good democracy. Consultation can do great good by opening the door to those who know what we do not know to make life better, but it can also do great harm if the public suspect that we are simply using them.

A little while after the announcement of Together: Building a United Community, the son of CSI, I attended a public meeting in north Belfast. The 10-year plan for removing peace walls was the hot and heavy topic of conversation and, specifically, the fear of those in the shadows of the walls that the consultation process would be used to achieve the ends OFMDFM wanted. In other words, those citizens were deeply sceptical of the consultation process. That cannot be right, it cannot be good for democracy, and it cannot be a proper way forward.

I will finish with this thought. I attended an invitation-only dinner some months ago. The guest speaker was a very senior member of the current Executive, who spoke in praise of a lobby group and said that it knew to get in early with its views because it understood that if you wait until the consultation process begins, it is too late to have any real influence. Too late once consultation begins.

Let us commit today to making consultation real, relevant and a resource that helps to rebuild a connection between this Chamber, which is currently so remote on the hill, and the people we serve. I commend the motion to the House. At this point, I would normally say that I look forward to the ministerial response, but, as I understand it, although there are four Ministers in OFMDFM, none will respond. I take that as a sign of what they feel about consultation, and that saddens me greatly.

Mr G Robinson: My apologies for not being here for the start of the debate.

This debate deals with a modern-day idea and how it can be best used to inform legislation and to ensure that it is most effective in all the right places. It is a useful tool, as the motions states, to strengthen ties with the public and with the voluntary and community sectors. As a tool, consultation is of use only if it is carried out in such a way that it does not prejudice issues or work towards a desired outcome of those carrying out the consultation. Whether consultation is done by questionnaire, focus groups or online means, it must provide accurate and useful information.

The current Department of Education consultation on funding seeks yes or no answers and is not the best informative use, in my belief. A quantity of information is not always better than quality information. It is essential that the Assembly and Departments involve the public in consultations to prevent allegations of the Assembly ignoring public wishes. However, that must be done in a manner that results in accurate, balanced and useful information. I believe that there is much knowledge to be gained from the voluntary and community sectors, especially since they are increasingly becoming the delivery agent for some services. They know best the information required to legislate, and so consultation with them is vital. It is advisable, therefore, that enforceable guidelines are developed and put in place, but it must be an Executive-agreed decision.

I also feel that, as a result of the various forms of consultation, guidelines for each form should be agreed so that everyone is clear about how each form of consultation process is carried out. Perhaps outside input from our universities can help produce guidelines for high standards. I also urge that a cost-benefit-analysis factor is included in the guidelines so that costs, which are very important, can be controlled and finance is not wasted in what is an important process for informing government.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Sinn Féin will not formally oppose the motion.

Public consultation, under section 75, is a legal requirement in developing policy and legislation, along with other statutory obligations and instruments. At the heart of the Executive's commitment to openness and inclusivity is consultation.

While concerns have been raised about the cost of consultation, having little or none will not serve the needs of the people. In fact, policies having to be put right because they do not work due to a lack of consultation will only cost the Government more.

Democracy means the strength of the power of the people. A democratic society is one in which ordinary people have a say in how it is run. We have to ensure equality and fairness for all our citizens, regardless of race, religion, gender, political opinion etc. Human rights must be protected for all our citizens, and Sinn Féin is committed to efficient government that is cost-effective. However, equality and representative safeguards cannot be diluted in any fashion.

Consultation is an important action that we can take to make our society more inclusive. It is important that we are socially aware, are of the people and understand the

problems and issues that are faced by community groups, NGOs and other groups that we are not part of. That is crucial.

In my constituency, I attended a recent consultation on the rural development programme. The people who were there represented a network or consortium of groups. For example, the umbrella group COSTA represents playgroups, regeneration partnerships, farmers, development groups, golf clubs, culture clubs, faith groups and disability groups. Those networks effectively represent hundreds — arguably thousands — of people in our community. But, not all will attend a consultation event. In that context, it is worth bearing in mind that an organisation, like COSTA, that attends a consultation event will have had a series of pre-consultations at which the main umbrella group elicits the views of the networks and articulates those views at the main consultation event. A consultation such as that will allow all stakeholders to have an input and to help shape the future of all aspects of rural life, from the provision of basic services, such as the lack of broadband in rural areas, bus routes, farming issues, right through to educational and health facilities.

It is important to note that every consultation will be different. Every case should be based on its own merits. Appropriate guidance on taking the correct steps should be taken in each case to ensure that people are given a chance to put forward their views.

The Equality Commission has set out seven guiding principles for consultation. It states that the consultation should begin as early as possible with affected individuals and representatives; consideration should be given to whether face-to-face meetings, small-group meetings, focus groups, discussion papers with the opportunity to comment in writing, questionnaires or internet discussions are best; consideration should also be given to the accessibility of the language; and the format of information must be considered to ensure that there are no barriers to the consultation process.

The Equality Commission also recommends that specific consideration be given on how to communicate information to children and young people, people with learning disabilities and ethnic minority groups. Finally, consultation must be a meaningful and genuine attempt to give people their voices; it should not be a tick-box exercise. Consultations must all meet their statutory and equality obligations, not least those in section 75. It is hard to understand why the motion highlights the community and voluntary sector, because all sector stakeholders on a relevant issue are equally important.

Mr Attwood: Features of life in this part of Ireland, which are now embedded in the law, are the practices and approaches that create a more inclusive society. Whilst the practice of consultation is a way to hear what people have to say, the objective and ambition has to be to create a more inclusive society. Consultation and the legal and other requirements for it are only an expression of that.

1.30 pm

I remember that, after the negotiations on the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, there were further negotiations to put the ambitions of the Good Friday Agreement into law through the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That was particularly the case with negotiations on clause 75 in

what was then the Northern Ireland Bill. That was all done to bring about this ambition and aspiration of having an inclusive society.

I welcome the motion, because I think that it creates an opportunity to put on the record in the House examples of where consultation — whatever the cost of consultation, Mr Nesbitt — is badly needed and where it is not living up to the desired requirements. Let me give you these examples. In his speech, Mr Nesbitt referred to the Civic Forum. Given that the Civic Forum is still referred to in the practical guidelines, Mr Nesbitt hinted that those guidelines should be updated in some way so that material can be redacted from them. Maybe not; you can come to me on that point.

The reason that I raised that point is that we are in the early stages of a process involving Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan, whereby those who are being consulted are in dedicated and substantial ways inputting into the Haass/O'Sullivan process. Three weeks ago, there were already 100 e-mail submissions to the talks process for Haass and O'Sullivan to hear and through which to consult wider society about where those talks might go. It is my view, given that Mr Nesbitt referred to the Civic Forum, that it should be convened and convened now to further capture wider society's views on the critical issues of flags, emblems, symbols, shared space, dealing with the past and parading.

If we believe in the spirit of the motion on the importance of consultation, we should express that in substance by reconvening the Civic Forum to further capture wider society's views on the critical issues of how that society is shaped.

Secondly, a statutory obligation falls to bodies as part of life in Northern Ireland. Mr Nesbitt will be very aware of that. It applies, in particular, to the role of the Victims' Commissioner in her advice to government arising from consultation with the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS). Mr Nesbitt was not able to chair the Committee for the First Minister and deputy First Minister last week, but the Victims' Commissioner gave withering evidence about the level of consultation that is ongoing between her and the VSS and the quality of that consultation to inform the Victims' Commissioner about what was going on in the funding of victims' services.

So, here we have a requirement laid down in law, under statute, for the Victims' Commissioner to take advice from others on how victims' issues are being addressed. Yet, she was withering in her evidence to the Committee about the meetings that she has had and the information that the VSS conveys to her in order that she fulfil her statutory function. Her concern was such to the point that, in the middle of September, the Victims' Commissioner went to "formally alert" — her words, not mine — the VSS about concerns that some had about the relationship and flow of information. If we are to truly value consultation —

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way to the Member. If we are truly to value consultation, let us see proper consultation between the VSS and the Victims' Commissioner so that the concerns about which she — rightly, in my view — formally alerts the VSS are not repeated.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I assure him that I was listening to the evidence from my sickbed on my laptop. In terms of proper communication, in his previous guise as a Minister, when there was the much-faulted OFMDFM power grab of planning powers in the Planning Bill, was he consulted? Have the public been consulted? Are that proposal and those amendments consistent with the consultation generally in the Planning Bill?

Mr Attwood: To answer the question, the First Minister and deputy First Minister told me what they might do, then they did it without any consultation with the Executive or further consultation with me. As I understand it, there was not even consultation with Sinn Féin and the DUP before the First Minister and the deputy First Minister decided that somehow planning would be best served if two people, unfit to fulfil planning functions in the North, took responsibility for it. That proves a point.

The Sinn Féin Member who spoke previously referred to the requirements for consultation and how those should look and be shaped. Perhaps the Minister of Education will take that on board when it comes to consultation with the community on the common funding formula. It was announced in June, and since then, last week and this, two consultation exercises are being carried out in the community, one in Omagh and the other in Belfast. Is that consultation, Ms McGahan, or is it not?

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

Ms Lo: I support the motion. I share Mr Nesbitt's disappointment at not seeing a Minister from OFMDFM here to respond to Members.

Public consultations are essential to show openness and inclusivity; to promote democracy, by involving the public in the decision-making process; and to ensure that we make the best policy possible. I accept that there will be a range of cost across consultations, dependent on the level of public interest and the need to hold public consultation meetings.

However, if we are to ask the public for opinions, the very least that we can do in return is listen to what they say. We cannot allow consultations to be mere tick-box exercises. The prime example of that from my Committee, the Committee for the Environment, is the Planning Bill. I am afraid that Mr Nesbitt has taken my thunder in that respect. Around 98% of the responses to specific clauses of the Bill were against their introduction. What did the House do in response? Did it delete the clauses or amend them to better reflect public opinion? No. Instead, we voted to speed up their introduction.

Another issue that I constantly bring to the Chamber is the sexual orientation strategy. Consultation on that document ended in 2006. It received many responses, and what has happened since? Nothing. On 18 June 2012, in response to a question for oral answer, junior Minister Bell assured the House that it was OFMDFM's:

"intention to bring forward proposals for a revised sexual orientation strategy, including a full public consultation, by the end of 2012." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 75, p320, col 1].

We are now at the end of 2013 and are still no further on. I learned from my colleague Chris Lyttle that the Committee

for OFMDFM has been waiting for a departmental briefing on the matter since February.

Those are just two examples of when we have asked the public for opinions through consultation and then subsequently ignored them. Is it really any wonder that public confidence in politics and politicians is so low? It is worse still when we do not bother to ask for opinions at all. Again, I refer to the Planning Bill. Two major amendments were made, designed to take powers from one Department and rights to appeal decisions from the public. Those were dropped in at the last moment, without any public consultation whatsoever. I commend the many thousands of people who took the time to tell us what they thought of the Planning Bill through the Amend the Bill campaign. Again, however, their views were not taken on board by the House.

I would welcome guidance from OFMDFM on best practice for running a consultation. I would welcome it even more if we could have any confidence that that Department would follow it. Can we really believe that a Department that failed even to consult with its colleagues around the Executive table about a strategy as important and cross-cutting as Together: Building a United Community will properly consult with the general public?

Consultations are not about just transparency; they help Departments and us, in our role as legislators, to identify gaps in policy. They give experts in their field the opportunity to voice opinions and advise on potential solutions that we could very well have overlooked. I recognise that a consultation is not necessarily an end in itself; however, it offers a chance for voices not always heard to have their say on matters that will affect their lives.

I support the motion. I welcome any definition of best practice forthcoming from the Department, but only if it is genuine and will be followed and implemented as it should be.

Mrs Hale: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. I state at the outset that the DUP is committed to ensuring that meaningful and purposeful consultation is a key component in gauging the views of all sectors and, importantly, members of the public.

I have no doubt that some consultation is not meaningful or purposeful and that it fails to connect with the very people from whom various Departments need critical feedback. This draws a question about whether the actual consultation process needs to be better at providing shorter time frames for a response, documentation that is simpler and easier to read and earlier engagement with key stakeholders, which has been stated, especially during the policy planning process.

It is fair to say that, if you look at the expenditure and the method of consultation across various Departments, we have moved on greatly from the days of just having a paper-based exercise. OFMDFM has already published a practical guide to policymaking, which was created in consultation with businesses, trade unions and the community and voluntary sector. The guide clearly lays out best practice and new methods for helping to bring forward policy initiatives and consultation in line with various sectors and industries. That is also backed by the concordat between the community and voluntary sector and government, which recognises the sector as a valued partner in contributing to policy development.

The motion brought by the Ulster Unionist Party today calls on OFMDFM to define best practice. I am uncertain about whether that will have any impact on the cost of consultation, or whether it will create similar levels of costs across all Departments. As I have stated, government already has a number of consultation guides, strategies and processes in place that give unequivocal roles in best practice when it comes to consultation.

The biggest complaint coming from many sectors is that they are suffering from consultation fatigue. That reinforces my earlier point that we must try to target the key stakeholders at the earliest juncture. The problem is that consultation costs money, but it is money worth spending if the process is meaningful and purposeful, with beneficial outcomes in policy development. It is not helpful to compare costs in different Departments and the differing number of consultations. Most people accept that certain Departments can have more policy initiatives in any given year. That is underlined when you witness that the Department of Finance and Personnel has the fewest number of consultations and spent no finance during 2010-11 due to the small amount of policies that can be developed from that Department.

Introducing more policies and best practice guides, as well as creating a standing advisory panel on consultations, which was called for by Mr Nesbitt, would go against what the people want to see on the streets. It would create further layers of needless bureaucracy and introduce —

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not recall recommending a standing advisory committee.

Mrs Hale: My apologies, Mr Nesbitt.

It would create layers of needless bureaucracy and introduce more governing documents. That is out of touch with what the public and private sectors are looking for from consultation. It just shows how we can easily lose touch with various sectors.

I strongly believe that the consultation process can be improved, but it does not require more guiding documentation. The consultation process could be quicker, but creating a further level of bureaucracy will certainly not help to speed up the consultation process. Consultation will cost money, and various Departments will be required to spend more amounts than others due to the number of new policies and key stakeholders that they must consult.

More consultation on policy development work could be done at Committee Stage. I am sure that all parties have a view on that. It seems that more could be done during that stage in the process to engage with more stakeholders, thus creating a better outcome for all concerned. It also means that, if there are concerns about the money, cost, and, importantly, the strategic direction of consultations from a Department or Minister, the Committee is there to hold to account those who have responsibility for those matters.

1.45 pm

Mr McCallister: Several things strike me about the motion. One difficulty with it is that, effectively, it criticises the way in which the parties in the Government consult. Every Member who has spoken so far belongs to one of those parties, so you are, effectively, criticising yourselves for the way that you carry out public consultations. The motion

refers to costs, but the important question is not about costs but value for money, and whether consultations provide information that will shape public policy and decisions, and make a real difference. The frustration that I hear on the ground about public consultations is the suspicion among the public that the policy has already been decided and that the consultation is mainly designed to fit it; not the other way around. We are not using our public consultations to shape policy and inform the Assembly, Departments and Committees. That is the problem.

Cost should not be the issue, but value for money. We could name, as many Members have, various consultations, some of which have proven very worthwhile and others that have not. We are at the stage where we are consulting on everything, so we have to look at value for money and effectiveness. Do we need to consult on absolutely everything? When do we listen to consultations? That takes us back to the old chestnut that people keep feeling that they have been ignored. We have only to look at the news in the past few days about the ban on blood donations from gay men. When you look at the responses to any of the relevant consultations, what the Assembly has said on the issue and what the Health Committee has said, you see that there is no correlation with that policy. When you look at what the court has said on the issue, you see that there seems to be no correlation with the response of the Minister.

All those things feed into the problem that, sometimes, we are consulting for the sake of consulting, and paying no real or meaningful attention to the responses. It is unfortunate that the motion is not better worded to take account of the importance of the value-for-money aspect or consideration of whether a consultation is necessary. A Department that carries out public consultations does not always get it right and has had decisions overturned by the courts.

It is, of course, disappointing that, to cap it all off, there is no ministerial response to the debate to say whether we are improving the system, whether we can change it, or what we can do. There is a complete lack of interest from OFMDFM in the issue.

Mr Kinahan: I thank my colleague and party leader for proposing the motion. Consultation is one of the key areas of our work in this institution, and it is very disappointing that we have no ministerial response, no junior ministerial response, and that very little interest has been shown in the debate. Consultation is vital. I am concerned about the fact that the Sinn Féin Member who spoke thought of opposing the motion, and I am also concerned that it will become clear that the DUP does not feel that there is any need to review the motion. As DUP Members listen to what I say, they will see why we feel that there is a need for a review and why there is a need to keep the cost element of the motion in mind when doing so.

We are meant to be listening to the electorate all the time, and consultation is one of the best ways of doing that. As has been said, if you wait for a consultation, in many cases you are too late because the Government will already have decided what is going to happen. The Belfast Agreement gave us consensus government, opposition through Committees, and policymaking and consultation through those same Committees. However, the actions of the two main parties have, in time, as good as neutered

this institution and its ability to be in touch with the public and, in many cases, to take action. I think today's lack of ministerial response proves that to be so.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, I would like to keep going, thank you.

My party leader has clearly put the case for a clearly defined best practice, so today we call on OFMDFM to do so as soon as possible. Those of you who have read your packs will see that you have a Cabinet Office set of guidelines, NI Direct government services tips, and seven consultation criteria produced by the business, enterprise and regulatory reform body, so there is plenty of advice there. We even have guidelines produced by OFMDFM in its 'Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland', yet we still do not seem to follow it all. The concordat between the voluntary and community sector and the Northern Ireland Government, which is also in your packs, hardly mentions or hints at consultation at all.

We need best practice and we need it to be defined. We then need to see it turned into action, not just by Ministers and their Departments but by Committees and councils, as everybody adopts and puts those principles into practice. I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will ensure that OFMDFM will see today's debate and respond.

I am sure that all of you, when in council or in other businesses, have been to consultation meetings where council staff have sat in a community hall and nobody has turned up. They have ticked the box and done the advertising, but nobody bothers coming. That is what we want to avoid. We should look at who we consult with. The Committees do well, but they need to regularly refresh their lists and call for different input. That is something that all of us here should continually do. I suggest that we should try to think outside the box as to who we are not remembering. Maybe we should do that twice a year.

It will be no surprise that I will concentrate on education. We have already had good examples of how poor consultation has been on planning and the sexual orientation strategy, but there are many cases that have gone wrong or that show that consultation is not done right in education. If we look at how we send out the message, we must use all forms of media, including digital, snail mail, advertising, newspapers and everything. The common funding consultation is about the only thing that the Minister and his Department have got right, although the questions that they ask, both of youths and of children, are all designed to get a set answer.

If we are thinking of whom you consult with, whether it is teachers, parents, parents-to-be, youths or children, as I have already mentioned, we do not bother with businesses. In fact, we have not bothered with all the other people who will be involved, like the grandparents. We must think of who we are consulting with. When involved in the debates on absenteeism, it became very clear from the brief that Departments and boards, if they do have good lists of governors and schools, do not have a good mechanism for consulting with them. There was certainly no evidence of any system of consulting properly with parents. Every Department must look at how it has its communication system set up so that it can consult properly.

We must also look at the message itself. The message must be intelligible and should be put out in such a way

that we can all understand it. Think of the bulk of paper that we all get and must understand in our Committees and how hard it is. Look at all the acronyms. We need good grounding. So when it comes to a consultation, it needs to be done in such a way that those whom you are consulting understand what they are being asked.

Look at the common funding consultation that is ongoing. At the moment, the home page no longer even refers to the consultation. The consultation does not have a direct link to the common funding formula report from Sir Robert Salisbury, which is the absolute key to that consultation. If you look at how that consultation was done and its timing, you will see that it was announced just as the school holidays started, after everybody had left their school. I sent an e-mail to every single school raising the concerns around the common funding formula suggestion of how cuts should be put in place in 670 schools. I got 10 replies by the end of the summer, to a nice short e-mail; they are now rolling in daily. That absolutely proves that timing is essential. We must not put out consultations when everybody is on holiday. We must make sure that the guidelines show when people are able to consult and respond.

We all know that the Education Minister has said that consultation clogs up the system, and we will keep repeating it. However, it is because it is treated in such a way that, of course, it clogs up the system. If it was done properly, quickly and flexibly, and if the systems were in place, we could actually listen to the electorate. We must not be too rigid; flexibility must be built in to consultation. It might be that, in some cases, you want to consult only for one or two weeks, because decisions might be needed that would save the electorate the cost of the closure of a school or of trying to keep it running for longer than is necessary.

If you talk to people in various Departments, they will tell you that they do not want quantity in responses but quality. So questions must be designed in such a way that we get a good, clear answer that helps us make better decisions. If you look at the common funding formula consultation, for children and for youths, you will see that they are loaded. That is the sort of thing that we should avoid.

On the Education and Skills Authority, we had a consultation on an entirely different Bill. When the new one came here, which we quite rightly opposed, I wrote to every school. I got 159 replies — well over the 10% needed. Of those, 88% said that they were not content with the level of consultation, and the 12% that were content were all from CCMS. I think that that tells us something.

If you talk to the public, you will find that most of them see consultation as being run by government as a tick-box exercise, as many have said, used by the Department or the body to justify what they have already decided they are going to do. No one feels that government are actually interested in hearing their views, taking into account their concerns or varying the policies that they are meant to be consulting on.

We need a sea change in how we consult. We need OFMDFM to review the consultation system. Use the guidelines that are there, make them better, get them to the Departments so that people actually follow them, monitor the process and make it happen. Let us ensure that this House actually listens to the people.

I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that public consultation is an important component of government policy formulation and decision-making; recognises that it can strengthen links between government and the public and, particularly, the community and voluntary sector; expresses concern at the disparity in costs associated with consultation across government Departments; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to define best practice.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Perhaps Members can take their ease until Question Time at 2.00 pm.

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Treacy Judgement

1. **Mr Milne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of Mr Justice Treacy's judgement on Friday that said that Minister Poots's decision to ban blood donations from gay men was "irrational" and in breach of the ministerial code, what steps the First Minister, as the DUP nominating officer, will take on the matter. (AQT 201/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Unlike a lot of people who commented on the issue, I read the judgement several times. He does not say that a decision to ban blood from men who have sex with men (MSM) is irrational. He said that the irrationality came from banning it in Northern Ireland but allowing a small quantity to come in from outside Northern Ireland. That could be rectified if the Minister so chose. He had, however, two other grounds, both of which the Executive will have to look at. The first relates to the constitutionality issue and whether the Minister had the power to take such a decision. I suspect that, no matter what the Department might ultimately decide and whether it appeals, the Department of Health in Great Britain might appeal the issue because there are devolution issues at stake as to whether the powers that are given to the member country can be devolved to the devolved regions, which was assumed to be the case. That is a separate issue that has to be considered.

With regard to the decision being in breach of the ministerial code, the provisions were included during my party's negotiations. They have been discussed on a number of occasions at Executive meetings, and we have taken advice from time to time from the Attorney General. There has been a general Executive view that if we were to carry it to the level to which Mr Justice Treacy carried it, everything would come to the Executive. There would be no spending or individual decisions by Ministers, and everything would have to come to the Executive Committee.

Mr Speaker: The First Minister's time has almost gone.

Mr P Robinson: There would be major difficulties in doing that, and the Executive will have to look at the issue. However, it is clear that any significant major decision that is controversial should come to the Executive Committee, but no member of the Executive Committee asked for that to be discussed.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept and agree with Judge Treacy's ruling on the matter?

Mr P Robinson: Are you trying to get me into trouble? Those matters can be considered by people from a legal background. If a Department does not agree with the judgement, it can appeal.

With the ministerial code, I was more content and felt that the Lord Chief Justice's ruling on that matter was sensible, in that he said that if there were a controversial or significant matter, it would be raised at the Executive Committee. That meant that only nuclear issues would come to the Executive rather than every single issue. If every single issue were brought to the Executive, no Minister would be able to take a decision on his or her own. Before people start cheering from the rafters, they should think about the ramifications of the judgement.

Twaddell Avenue Protest

2. Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they agree that the ongoing protest camp at Twaddell Avenue is causing major concern and what they hope jointly to do to resolve the situation for the people in that neighbourhood. (AQT 202/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I have no doubt that there is disruption to people in the neighbourhood and additional pressure on the PSNI because of the extra work. However, in this country, we defend people's right to protest peacefully and lawfully. As long as protests are carried out peacefully and lawfully, those of us who are part of a democratic institution should be content to support people's right to protest.

As regards what we are doing about it, the deputy First Minister and I brought in colleagues, namely the leaders of other parties. We recognised that there are some outstanding issues in relation to parades, flags and the past that need to be resolved. We, therefore, came together and agreed that Dr Richard Haass should facilitate and chair an all-party group that would look at those outstanding issues. Those are the very issues that are at the heart of the protest campaign at Twaddell. I urge everybody to remember that they have to uphold the rule of law. They have to cooperate with the PSNI, and they have to abide by the conditions that are laid down. However, I protect people's right to protest, providing that they do it lawfully and peacefully.

Mr Byrne: I thank the First Minister for his answer. The Haass talks process has started. However, the business community in Belfast is very concerned that there might be more protest parades in the city coming up to the festive season. What words of encouragement can he give that protests will not end in disruption and cause havoc for shoppers and retailers?

Mr P Robinson: I sympathise with the traders in Belfast, in particular, who had a very bad period around Christmas last year. We talk about rights. There are, of course, competing rights. There is the right of people to carry out their daily business, whether that is in businesses or carrying out commercial activity in the centre of Belfast. People carrying out protest activities have to take into account the rights of others and of the wider society. I have heard of some proposals to hold protests leading up to the Christmas period. I hope that people will reflect on the damage that that would cause to Northern Ireland and to traders in Belfast. It would potentially lead to a loss of jobs. The protest in Twaddell Avenue will not have that impact, but it is a possible outcome if protests were brought into the centre of Belfast.

Investment Conference

3. Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to update the House on the highly successful investment conference that was held in Belfast last week. (AQT 203/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The Member has used the two words that sum it up: highly successful. Of course, the ultimate success will be measured in outcomes and our ability to tie down jobs and investment in Northern Ireland.

The deputy First Minister and I have now been involved in three investment conferences. There was one back in 2008, then the Washington investment conference, which was kindly organised by the United States Administration under then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and now this one. We are both agreed that, in the contact that we have had with investors, this was by far the most successful conference that we have had.

The response was very positive from those whom we spoke to at the dinner at Hillsborough Castle on Thursday evening. I noticed that the BBC talked about wining and dining, and so forth. I have to say that it is that kind of networking that really gets a connection with businesspeople. It is an opportunity to find out what projects various companies are looking at and, therefore, how we might fit into their needs and requirements. At that dinner, we spoke to a number of people — the deputy First Minister at his table, and me at mine — who are looking at Northern Ireland as a possible place for investment. It was encouraging to find out the next day that a lot of companies that had Northern Ireland on their shortlist were indicating that Northern Ireland had now leapfrogged to the top of their shortlist. That indicates how successful the investment conference was.

The deputy First Minister and I went down to Invest Northern Ireland's offices this morning to thank the team who worked so hard. We gave due recognition to Alastair Hamilton —

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is almost gone.

Mr P Robinson: — and his team for the preparation and work that they carried out.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the First Minister for his answer. During the Prime Minister's visit, did the First Minister have an opportunity to raise with him the issue of the much-needed DVA jobs in Coleraine?

Mr P Robinson: Yes. When I was down in Coleraine to meet the workers, I gave them an assurance that I would raise it with the Prime Minister.

The deputy First Minister and I spoke to the Prime Minister about that in the private meeting that we had with him. We presented him with an aide-memoire that gave background details of the case. He indicated that, while there is a consultation going on, he cannot make any definitive remarks but will make contact with us closer to the time when a decision is being taken.

Victims and Survivors

4. Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures they have in place to ensure the appropriate level of cooperation between the Victims

and Survivors Service and the Victims' Commissioner to ensure full compliance with all statutory requirements. (AQT 204/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I am grateful for that question, because I have noted that some remarks have been made more recently on that subject, as, no doubt, the Member has. In the Department, we have arranged to bring together the victims' service and the Victims' Commissioner with some of our own people, and we will talk over those issues. Hopefully, we will get them resolved. Action, therefore, is under way.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for his answer. Are the Department and the Minister satisfied that the needs of victims and survivors will be acknowledged and addressed as a result of the measures adopted by the Department?

Mr P Robinson: These are the issues that must be constantly under review. None of us should be complacent on these matters. If there are specific issues that the Victims' Commissioner wants to raise — I understand that she made some comments during a Committee hearing — we will want to hear about the areas in which the commissioner feels that the service has fallen short, and we will be happy to talk with the service about how those needs can be met, if there are shortcomings. We are in no way complacent. We do not believe that we have yet reached the level of perfection that would allow us to sit back. Constructive criticism is something that none of us should run away from. Let us see what the issues are, and let us see how we might resolve them.

Treacy Judgement

5. **Mr Storey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the First Minister's comments at the beginning of topical questions, to indicate to the House what implications Mr Justice Treacy's judgement could have on Executive business. (AQT 205/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I noticed that one comment that was made was that, on the foot of Mr Justice Treacy's judgement, everything that is in the in tray of any Minister will have to be transferred to the departmental in tray of the deputy First Minister and me. That is not a position that we want to find ourselves in. Obviously, we have to work out where the bottom line is with regard to what it is important for the Executive to deal with. Any other Executive will deal with major issues. On the basis of Mr Justice Treacy's judgement, we would have to deal with every funding application and the decisions that the Education Minister, the roads Minister or the housing Minister might make on where they will have schools, hospitals, houses, roads etc. Those are issues that we have left at departmental level. Of course, even lower-level issues would have to be decided by the Executive Committee, so it would be a considerable burden on the Executive if we were to go down that route.

Of course, we always knew — the law is very clear on it — that decisions that are controversial, significant or cross-cutting should come to the Executive. I thought that we had an understanding that, if any of the Executive members believed that something fell within those categories, they should ask for those matters to be brought to the Executive. Of course, it is not just the Executive who will have a role in these circumstances: not only do we now find that the public, through the courts, would have a role,

but, of course, the Assembly has a role. Any 30 Members can require an issue that they believe to be controversial, significant or cross-cutting to come to the Executive as well.

Mr Storey: I thank the First Minister for his reply. I will tease that out a little bit further: is the First Minister indicating that there are implications following the Treacy judgement specifically about issues of concern in education, which are very rife in the community at this time, around the future of the Dickson plan and the common funding formula?

Mr P Robinson: I do not believe that the Treacy judgement has any additional impact on those issues, because I think that was already required under previous judgements. Several judgements have been given in and around the ministerial code and the requirement to bring material to the Executive. The Treacy judgement goes beyond anything that we have had to date, and that is why the Executive have to look at the issue. Clearly, whether it is the common funding formula or the Dickson plan, those issues are controversial. There is no doubt about their controversy. They are also cross-cutting and, therefore, would have to come to the Executive anyway.

2.15 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for topical questions. We will move on to questions for oral answer to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Attorney General

1. **Ms Boyle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the review of the Office of the Attorney General. (AQO 4764/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The Member is getting a double dose today.

In 2010, the Executive agreed that, in addition to his wider constitutional and legal functions, the newly appointed Attorney General should act as chief legal adviser to the Executive and Departments. At that time, it was also decided that aspects of his legal adviser role could be reviewed after a period of operation.

In 2012, in our capacity as joint chairmen of the Executive, the deputy First Minister and I invited the Rt Hon Dame Elish Angiolini, who had particular relevant experience as a law officer in a devolved Administration, to carry out a limited review. The review was to examine the arrangements for Ministers and Departments seeking and handling legal advice, as well as the balance between the Attorney General's role as a chief legal adviser to the Executive and his various statutory responsibilities. Dame Elish conducted her review over the summer and autumn of last year, and her report was delivered to us within the agreed timescale in October 2012. We have since sought the views of our main legal officers, including the Attorney General, on the report and its recommendations. We are now considering policy options arising from the report and from our legal officers' views.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the First Minister for that detailed response. Given that the Attorney General's appointment is for a four-year term that will end in 2014, what arrangements have been put in place for either the reappointment of the current Attorney General or the recruitment of a new Attorney General?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I have already had discussions about the matter. I think that we have a fairly settled view, but we have procedures to go through before such an outcome is announced. The procedures are under way, and we hope to be able to make an announcement within weeks.

Mr B McCrea: Given that the Attorney General questioned the legitimacy of the challenge to Justice Treacy, which we have been talking about, and felt that there was no need to bring the issue to the Executive, is there some sort of schism between the Executive and the High Court?

Mr P Robinson: I do not think that there is any schism between the Executive and the High Court. The Executive and the Assembly have to act within the law. That is a requirement that is placed on us all. Of course, as the Member will know, the law is often open to interpretation. I suspect that another judge on another day might have given a different view on some of the issues in the Treacy judgement. Such is the legal system. That is why barristers have grown so rich in the past. The reality for us is that we have to deal with the judgements as they come down, and, of course, the Executive will comply with any judgement from the courts.

Mr Attwood: Given the current Attorney General's inclination to join in Supreme Court cases, European Court cases and, indeed, cases involving the alleged scandalising of a judge, do you think that, in retrospect and given the review that you referred to, the role that the Executive gave to the Attorney General in July 2010 was too generous and now needs to be constrained?

Mr P Robinson: I think that the Member has put his finger on one of the key issues: there is the difficulty with, at one and the same time, the Attorney General being the adviser to the Executive and, on the other hand, having the role independently. His independent role has on occasions required him to take actions against the Executive. We will not deal with what the outcome of that may have been, but it is clearly one of the issues that Dame Elish has looked at, that we are looking at and that will form part of any proposals that we bring to Executive colleagues.

Investment

2. Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what investment opportunities and benefits have been identified during their programme of international engagement. (AQO 4765/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Our international engagement has initiated a number of potential opportunities that we hope to announce over the coming months. More generally, our direct intervention has helped open new trade markets for local companies in China and secure the participation of a number of Chinese companies in the hugely successful investment conference last week. We were also delighted to see that our meetings in China with key stakeholders have resulted in the expansion of the Confucius Institute to a number of classrooms throughout Northern Ireland. We continue to engage with officials from the Chinese Government on a number of projects, and, as was publicly revealed last Thursday, the Executive are advancing plans to establish a new office in the Chinese capital, Beijing. We hope to be in a position to provide more details on that in due course.

Our visit to New York last month provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships with existing investors and to seek to begin new relationships with potential ones. We also extended an invitation to the investment conference to a wide range of business executives. Our visits to North America over a number of years have produced real and tangible benefits. We have consolidated relationships with some globally recognised brand names, including, for example, Universal Studios and HBO, which continue to invest in the Paint Hall and the Titanic Studios in Belfast. More specifically, our meetings with the senior board of United Airlines directly helped to address its concerns over UK air passenger duty (APD) in Belfast. By securing the devolution of APD to the Assembly, we helped to maintain the long-term commitment of United to its hugely important transatlantic flight. It is the only direct route from Belfast to the US, and it is of significant strategic importance to us in realising our foreign direct investment (FDI) potential. Our meetings with the top management teams in the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and senior executives at Cowen International Ltd, on the —

Mr Speaker: The First Minister's time is almost gone.

Mr P Robinson: — back of much hard work by officials from Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington, culminated in both companies committing significant investment packages in Northern Ireland.

Mr Storey: I thank the First Minister for his detailed reply. In my constituency, we have seen the outworkings of some of the benefit of that, given the ongoing filming that is taking place in places such as Ballintoy and the Dark Hedges. I am glad that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is following the lead of the Executive —

Mr Speaker: Do I detect a question?

Mr Storey: — in going to China. Indeed, he is in China this week. Will the First Minister indicate to the House what future investment trips the Executive are planning to expand on the success already achieved?

Mr P Robinson: As far as the Executive as a whole is concerned, I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has just returned from South Africa and had a very successful trip there. Next week, the deputy First Minister and I will be in Boston and Chicago, and in December we will be in Japan.

Mr Allister: I am sure that the First Minister sees himself as the First Minister of all of Northern Ireland. With that in mind, does he have any concerns that, in the past year — 2012-13 — 80% of the FDI visits to Northern Ireland were to the Belfast constituencies? For example, 54 visits were made to East Belfast and a mere four to North Antrim. How does the First Minister see a more level playing field for foreign direct investment being created across Northern Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: I am glad that some of the job announcements over the past number of days have been for areas west of the Bann. There were two announcements in Omagh, and, at the round-table meeting with the Prime Minister and a number of potential investors, people to my right and my left were talking about bringing jobs to the Londonderry area.

Attempts are being made by Invest Northern Ireland to spread the jobs, but these are private sector employers

that will make their own decisions about where it is best for them to be on the basis of a lot of logistical issues. We are dealing with financial and business services, and it is unquestionably the case that many of them are gravitating to the Belfast area. That is one of the issues that has led the Executive to look at, for instance, where public sector jobs that are perhaps more mobile should be situated.

There is no reluctance on the part of Invest Northern Ireland to encourage businesses to go to where the people are. Ultimately, the labour force is an essential part of it. If the skills and the people are there and the rest of the logistics are in place, Invest Northern Ireland can put forward a much more credible case.

Mr Byrne: I thank the First Minister for his answers thus far. I totally agree that the jobs announced last week for Omagh by Telestack and Terex Powerscreen were very welcome. Given that the Canadian commissioner to London said recently that direct flights from Belfast to Canada were crucial and given that Bombardier has announced increased jobs, what are the prospects for having those direct flights reinstated?

Mr P Robinson: Ultimately, those are matters for the airlines and the airports. When we have been asked to speak to an airline company, we have done so. I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has spoken to airlines in North America, and the deputy First Minister and I spoke to airlines during trips to the Middle East. We will continue to do that, but, ultimately, the package has to be put together by the airport to bring them in, and the airline has to be satisfied that the customer base will be there for that purpose.

Like the Member, I am delighted that Bombardier has announced another 250 skilled jobs, and that is first-class in terms of getting jobs that go beyond the income medium. During a recent trip to Montreal, the deputy First Minister and I visited Bombardier and met many people from Northern Ireland who were working out there. When I spoke to Pierre Beaudoin, the chief executive of Bombardier, during the conference, he indicated that there was real desire on the part of people from Northern Ireland who have gone to Canada to come back to Northern Ireland, now that the jobs are in Northern Ireland. You will see that trend occurring much more over the coming days.

Crumlin Road Gaol

3. **Ms McCorley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have for the further development of the Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast. (AQO 4766/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The Crumlin Road Gaol has proven to be a significant success, attracting 85,000 visitors in less than a year. The next phase of the development is the boutique distillery and restaurant, and work will start on that project later this year. We continue to consider options for other parts of the jail, including B wing, D wing and the wardens' cottages. The jail's development and its success in creating local employment opportunities and enhancing community confidence are practical examples of the Executive's commitment to the regeneration of north Belfast.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he outline the job opportunities for young people from deprived areas?

Mr P Robinson: As I understand it, there is already a close relationship between the community organisations in the area and the management of the jail regeneration. I think that regular meetings take place. I think that about 30 jobs have been created through the tours and the conference element of the jail, and there is the potential, I believe, for about 60 jobs for the boutique distillery. All those jobs are capable of being filled by local people. Obviously, employers will remember employment law and do it on the basis of merit, but I suspect that there are jobs that will easily fit the abilities of people in the local community.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the First Minister. Given the successes that he celebrates with regard to the jail, does he have any regrets — personal or professional — over the sale of the courthouse for £1?

Mr P Robinson: The two are connected underground, and one could see a strong case being made for how they could have been combined into one project. For that reason, I understand that a task force is looking at what might be done to regenerate the courthouse, and I believe that DSD officials and others are looking into that issue. Major investment will be needed to carry out the work, and I suspect that the longer it is left derelict, the costlier it will become. It is owned by the private sector, albeit at what one might describe as a giveaway price. However, I was not involved in that and, therefore, I cannot comment on how sensible the sale was. I will comment if it ends up being sold back to the Executive at a much higher price.

2.30 pm

Mr Spratt: I thank the First Minister for his answers. What is his evaluation of the success of the Crumlin Road Gaol in its first year of operation as a tourist attraction?

Mr P Robinson: I have visited the jail on several occasions for conferences and, for instance, a 'Game of Thrones' event. People who are not from Northern Ireland went around the jail and were blown away by its potential. As I indicated, 85,000 people have gone through the jail during its time as a tourist attraction — probably many more before that. That indicates that we are probably ahead of the target. I think we had a target of 90,000 for the first year; at 85,000 with two months to go, I think that we will exceed the target. Those numbers speak for themselves.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the First Minister's supportive comments. In fact, I have seen him many times in the jail. *[Laughter.]* Does he believe that enough effort is being put into publicising this tourist project? Will he give further backing to raising its profile?

Mr P Robinson: Clearly, with the statistics that I outlined, the targets are being met and, therefore, they must be doing something right. I was shocked when one of my special advisers told me that Crumlin Road Gaol was the number one tourist destination on TripAdvisor on a list that included Titanic Belfast. I do not know whether that says something about the people who use TripAdvisor, but it indicates that a large number of people feel that the jail is a good attraction and worth going to see. I hope that this question will gain coverage that will give the jail additional advertising.

Child Poverty

4. **Mr D Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the reasons for the delay in producing the next action plan for the 'Ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016', given that the 2008-2011 action plan has expired. (AQO 4767/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The current 10-year strategy will continue until 2016. Work to further the aims of the strategy is being taken forward through the Delivering Social Change framework, which seeks to address the linked issues of poverty and improving children's lives.

Through Delivering Social Change, we are moving away from long lists of existing activities towards smaller numbers of cross-cutting and more strategic objectives. Those are additional to existing work across government. In support of that development, the 'Children and Young Persons Early Action' document, published on 14 November 2012, takes full account of the principles of the 10-year strategy for children and young people, including the high-level outcomes. It identifies the key priorities for children and families over the remaining years of the 10-year strategy. The document identifies five priority work programmes and has been developed to assist key stakeholders in delivering programmes and initiatives.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire sóisearach as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Will he outline the five priorities in the new action plan?

Mr Bell: I could go through each of the priorities in turn, but the critical thing for us is to directly improve the lives of individual children.

We are looking at improving children's educational outcomes and health. What we are looking at in a broader sense is to ensure that children have the best opportunity to raise themselves out of poverty.

I will give one example of that because I cannot break down each of the five priorities in detail in two minutes. One thing that we know — and, as a teacher, the Member will appreciate this — is that children with five good GCSEs can raise themselves and, in many cases, their families out of poverty. One of the most strategic actions that we have taken is to ensure that children who are sitting on D or E grades in literacy and numeracy can get the additional support that can transport them to a position where they get a GCSE pass and, thereby, to where the educational evidence is leading, which is to a future that allows them to have sustainable jobs with reasonable pay.

I understand that we have some 250-plus additional teachers coming in to support children. They will be in place by December. That, in essence, encapsulates what we are doing in the Delivering Social Change project.

Mr Speaker: The junior Minister's time is almost up.

Mr Bell: I could talk about transitions, integrated delivery and joined-up planning and commissioning. However, we can have those conversations at a later stage.

Mrs Hale: I thank the junior Minister for his very detailed answer. In fact, he is now getting the chance to expand

on what he was just talking about. Can he expand on the actions that have been taken on children and young people in the Delivering Social Change project?

Mr Bell: Well, you have early years and early intervention. You have literacy and numeracy. You have the transitions. You have the need for integrated delivery and joined-up planning and commissioning. In recent days, the most significant of those was the OFMDFM launch of Bright Start, which is the Executive's project to deliver affordable and integrated childcare. It sets out the broad direction for the childcare strategy and names, through 15 key first actions, the main priorities that were identified during the research. The importance of that is that it is a £10 million investment by OFMDFM directly into early years and childcare. That is the bright start. What does that mean? It means that hundreds of jobs will be created through social enterprises and that work will be made available in the childcare sector. It aims for 8,000 young people to have either a new or existing affordable childcare place. I say "new". The vast majority of those 8,000 childcare places — some 7,000-plus — will be new. That will allow many parents to re-engage with the employment market. We have also looked at the quality of the childcare. It will allow many children to get that hand up as they proceed into their future education. The Bright Start project is, probably, in my view, one of the most exciting initiatives that we have taken. It is cutting edge in leading the way in social enterprise and childcare practice.

Mr Kinahan: I note that two people have asked a question of the Minister. We got very little detail on what the policy will actually do to improve the education and health of children or parents' re-engagement. Could we have more detail, not just on Bright Start but on how things will work over the next 10 years to actually help children?

Mr Bell: I am not sure that the question is a fair reflection of the level of detail that I have gone into specifically. Delivering Social Change focuses on where need actually exists. I have given two specific examples. The first related to literacy and numeracy. We were told to ensure that children had a foundation in literacy and numeracy in primary school and, then, that those children got the opportunity to obtain a pass at GCSE level, which would, in effect, be a passport for them to a better educational future.

The second key point that I outlined was on the issue of childcare. That £10 million will create hundreds of extra jobs and, critically, allow social enterprises to look at how those childcare places can be facilitated, specifically by providing flexibility, ensuring affordability and ensuring that placements are in areas that families can directly access. Those are the details of new policies that are directed to meet the need that the research base has shown us and that friends and families who are in direct need of childcare have asked us to provide. Seven thousand opportunities for new childcare is a level of detail that we have not had before. This new and exciting initiative is the pinnacle of the whole Delivering Social Change framework.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

5. **Ms Ruane** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the sexual orientation strategy. (AQO 4768/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell: As outlined in Together: Building a United Community, we are committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. A consultation document that will inform public consultation on the strategy is under consideration in the Department. That strategy will be published once the consultation process has been completed.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I note that the First Minister did not answer the supplementary question posed by my colleague Ian Milne and that he attempted to divert away from the key issue of equality for the gay community. I wonder whether the junior Minister will share with us why, given the delays in bringing forward this strategy, the DUP is so resistant to rights for the gay community.

Mr Bell: I think that the premise of the Member's question is somewhat significantly flawed because she is asking questions of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and the last time I looked, the deputy First Minister was from your political party, not the Democratic Unionist Party. Let me be very clear: the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is committed to respecting the human dignity and worth of every one of our citizens.

Mr McGimpsey: In light of the junior Minister's answer, how does he feel that fits with having an Executive of 11 Departments that are headed up by 11 permanent secretaries, all of whom are male? There is not a single female amongst them.

Mr Bell: I can look in particular to my colleague Arlene Foster, who has done an outstanding job in her role. Her work and that of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in recent times, and the profile that she has taken forward, just show what can be achieved in Northern Ireland when we work together. In recent times, somewhere in the region of 2,000 new jobs have been created in Northern Ireland. Without breaking any commercial confidentiality, I know from listening carefully to what the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister and the First Minister have said that there are many companies, that the confidence is there, and that, in addition to those 2,000 jobs, we are confidently looking at hundreds, going into thousands, of new jobs being created.

Of course, the obvious point from the Member about the number of Departments is that it is a question of "Physician, heal thyself", because your party created that number of Departments. At that time — the record is clear — the Democratic Unionist Party looked to have more efficient government, but it was your party that created it. Can you tell me who your party's female Minister was then? Oh, that is right — you did not have one. Is that right? OK. In this current position, you still do not have a female Minister. So, on that question, it really is a case, sir, of "Physician, heal thyself".

2.45 pm

Environment

Statutory Transition Committees

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the establishment of the statutory transition committees. (AQT 211/11-15)

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment):

Fortunately, I am sitting close enough to Mr Lunn to hear the question. He is looking for an update on the situation with the establishment of statutory transition committees (STCs). My predecessor issued guidance on the formation and nominations to the new STCs at the start of July, and the recommendation was to select nominees through either d'Hondt, Sainte-Laguë or single transferable vote. Importantly, that was to be based on the 2011 council election results and, therefore, reflect the democratic will of the communities that they were supposed to represent. It was deemed that guidelines would be more appropriate than regulations at this stage as some of the voluntary transition committees went beyond the three methods that I outlined to accommodate power sharing and to encourage good practice and fair representation. However, the guidelines have subsequently been ignored by a few councils. The vast majority have complied, but the offending councils are Lisburn, Castlereagh, Ballymoney, Coleraine and Strabane, and they have also dismissed subsequent correspondence from me on the issue.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. It seems incredible that the body that produced the legislation — namely, this body — to set up the new councils could not enforce a decent system of representation for the transition committees, but I understand that the Minister does not have the specific power to do that through any of the three systems that he mentioned. Does he have any other way of putting pressure on those errant councils to do the decent thing and produce proper representation?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Lunn. I have sought further advice from officials and, indeed, legal advice on how we can resolve those irregularities, if you wish to call them that, and ensure that all councils comply so that STCs can be properly constituted and get on with the important business that they ought to be doing. I have also written to political party leaders urging them to speak to their colleagues on councils to emphasise to them the importance of displaying political maturity and putting the needs and democratic wishes of the electorate ahead of selfish party political needs.

Councils: Chief Executive Posts

2. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has received any correspondence from the statutory transition committees in relation to open competition for chief executives. (AQT 212/11-15)

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment to the Department of the Environment.

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Maginness. That is handy because the question is on the same subject.

I received correspondence from two STCs and a number of councils on the matter, so I have written to all statutory transition committees and all councils to clarify the position and address their concerns. My predecessor took the decision to use open competition to fill the new chief executive posts, taking account of employment law, 'A Compendium of the RPA Guiding Principles, Code of Practice and Guidance Notes' published by the Public Service Commission and OFMDFM, and legal advice that indicated that these were new posts. Some statutory

transition committees and councils have concerns that current chief executives could claim for unfair dismissal if they are made redundant because of the decision on open competition. Legal advice confirmed that the current chief executives do not have a legal right to be considered for those posts in a closed pool. Therefore, a claim of unfair dismissal as a result of this decision is not defensible. Indeed, the position is quite the contrary. The new chief executive posts must be filled by open competition, in accordance with statute, as that is now legislated for in the statutory transition regulations that the Assembly passed on 2 July.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. He has given certain legal reassurance to councils and statutory transition committees but can he assure the House that the advice that he has received and has given to councils will be upheld?

Mr Durkan: The open recruitment for the new posts must proceed in accordance with statute. The statutory transition committee regulations set in law that the recruitment has to be by open competition. As I said, it would be unlawful to use any other method.

The only potential for legal challenge would be as a result of a failure to adhere to the recruitment process. That process will be overseen by the Local Government Staff Commission and will meet all employment best practice and legal requirements. Independent assessors have also been appointed to ensure that the process meets these requirements.

All STCs will be made aware of their responsibilities in relation to recruitment, and panel members must partake in compulsory training prior to sitting on any selection panels.

Environment Policy Priorities

3. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of last week's environment forum, whether he can identify his key policy priorities for the time ahead. (AQT 213/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist; déanfaidh mé mo dhícheall freagra a thabhairt uirthi anois. I thank the Member for his question and will try my best to answer it. Regrettably, I was unable to attend the environment forum last week; I was at a prearranged conference in Scotland on climate change, which was very important. While there, I met with my Scottish counterpart, Paul Wheelhouse MSP.

Mr Wilson: How big was your carbon footprint?

Mr Durkan: My footprints are big enough — *[Laughter.]* — as are the footsteps I have to follow in.

I have particular policies. I have had feedback from that forum. The forum is a very important way of drawing on experience, knowledge and opinion from across the North on a range of issues. My policies centre on different things: I have a very wide remit, as you are aware. I am keen to increase further the speed at which planning applications are processed and, hopefully, approved. I look forward to working with businesses and communities to achieve those results. I would like to reduce the amount of litter on our streets and, by increasing recycling, the amount of waste we are sending to landfill.

To do those things, we have to increase our engagement with the public in order to get them to have more respect for, and to play a greater role in, their immediate environment and, therefore, the wider environment. The conference that I was at in Scotland was on climate change. Obviously, that issue presents us with huge problems —

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is almost gone.

Mr Durkan: — and is also a key priority of mine.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. I am glad to hear that one of his key priorities is the speeding up of planning approval. That has to be a key priority, particularly with strategic projects. Will he update the House on the state of play on planning approval for the three stadia in Belfast?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist eile. It is very important that we speed up the planning process. I said that I would like to speed up the process for approvals, but, hopefully, we can create a system where consensus is reached before an application is even submitted. That method was applied to the stadia application in Belfast, and it yielded differing results. On the one hand, there is Windsor Park, where the pre-application community consultation flushed out quite a few problems and resulted in no objections when the application was made; on the other hand, Casement Park has been quite publicly subjected to other objections. I have met with objectors to that project and, in the coming weeks, I will meet with the Ulster Council, which is the proposer of that project. I am very hopeful of getting an outcome that will be acceptable to both parties, and I would like to do so quickly.

Shale Gas

4. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he accepts that any decision on shale gas extraction should be based on the best possible scientific evidence and that if the evidence were satisfactory, it could have an extremely positive impact on our limited energy supply and might help us to reduce fuel poverty. (AQT 214/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I agree entirely that any decision has to be fully based on evidence and science. That is why I am determined to gather all the information and evidence that I can on hydraulic fracturing before making a decision on any application. I must restate that, currently, there are no applications for fracking in the North.

My officials in the NIEA are working with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland in an attempt to gather as much information as possible, not just from this island but across the world where we can look at the experiences of other countries. Obviously, some of those tell positive stories about the alleviation of fuel poverty. However, I am concerned that some of those victories are very short term, and we do not have any evidence of the long-term effects of hydraulic fracturing, either on the environment and countryside or on people's health.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very sympathetic to the Member. However, if he looks at the list of questions for oral answer, he will see that the question that he asked in topical questions is very similar to one on that. *[Interruption.]* Order. I will allow the supplementary question, and I will listen.

Mr B McCrea: I appreciate that direction from the Speaker. I will pick up on the point. In his response, the Minister agreed that scientific evidence would be the basis of his decision. I just wondered, given that we have a lot of scientists at Stormont today in the Long Gallery, when the Minister will have gathered such scientific evidence and when he might be minded to come to tell us his conclusions?

Mr Durkan: Unfortunately, I am not in a position to give an answer to that question. I will go back to my officials at the NIEA and see how their research is going. As I said, there is no application on my desk or that of anyone else, I hope, for hydraulic fracturing. When an application comes in, it will be subject to the full and rigorous planning process.

Councils: Recruitment

5. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of the Environment what reassurance he can give to councils and statutory transition committees that DOE-driven recruitment for senior officers will not result in legal action being taken against them. (AQT 215/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would probably give the same assurances that I gave to Mr Maginness a few minutes ago on the same topic. The position is quite the contrary. The only posts that we are talking about here are the new chief executive posts. I have given a directive that posts below chief executive level will not be subject to open competition, but the new chief executive posts must be filled by open competition in accordance with statute, as this is now legislated for in the statutory transition regulations, which the Assembly passed on 2 July.

There is a further concern about the failure to consult current chief executives on the method of recruitment and the potential for redundancy. As the current chief executives have no automatic right to the new posts, there was no requirement to consult them about the appointment procedure. There also seems to be the view that chief executives are being treated differently from other staff, as I outlined: that is not the case. The current chief executives will have the same statutory TUPE-type protections as all other local government staff.

3.00 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for topical questions. We now move to questions for oral answer.

Symbols and Emblems

1. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has the power to issue guidelines to district councils on achieving equality or neutrality in relation to symbols and emblems. (AQO 4779/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Decisions on symbols and emblems are a matter for each council taking account of its duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the council's own equality scheme. My Department has no legislative power to issue guidance on the matter, as it does not have responsibility for the policy on equality of opportunity. The major modernisation programme that will be implemented over the coming months to deliver our vision for strong, modern community-focused local government provides a significant opportunity for elected representatives to address the issue, respecting all

sections of the community. The reorganisation of councils represents a new beginning for local government here. The new councils and the councillors need to provide civic leadership for the whole community in the local government district.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he not see a role for the proposed Commissioner for Complaints in dealing with many of the issues?

Mr Durkan: I think that that would be a very busy role indeed. There is to be a Commissioner for Complaints; that was covered when we debated the Local Government Bill on 1 October. The Committee Stage of the Bill has been extended. I think that there will be quite a few amendments at that stage, and that will possibly be one. However, it will be done more through regulation than primary legislation. The issue of emblems is very sensitive and incendiary, and, whoever handles it, it must be handled as such.

Mr Storey: Given the concern that many seem to have about equality and how everybody is treated fairly, will the Minister tell the House, on the current practice in local authorities and councils, how many of the councils that are controlled by nationalists adhere to even designated days on the flying of the national flag in Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: Unfortunately, I do not have that information to hand, but I undertake to get back to the Member in writing with specifics. This is precisely the kind of debate that I do not want the Local Government Bill to get bogged down in and why I think, therefore, that it is not the best vehicle through which we can deal with the flags issue. Other fora have been set up to deal with such matters. There is the political reference group that my predecessor, Alex Attwood, set up, and there are the proposals from the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which are now the ongoing Haass talks and from which I am hopeful of a positive outcome.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer, particularly given that his home patch is where leadership was shown through power sharing in Derry City Council generations ago. What protections will minorities be entitled to under the reform of local government?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for her question, which I did not write, despite the reference to Derry. The Local Government Bill, which I introduced in the Assembly on 23 September and which passed Second Stage on 1 October, will introduce a system of checks and balances to protect the interests of minority communities in council decision-making. The proposed governance arrangements will provide for the introduction of a call-in procedure that will enable 15% of the membership of a council — that is, any six people in a 40-member council — to request the review of a decision in certain circumstances. It is proposed that a call-in will be used where the procedures used in reaching a decision are questioned or where there is an issue concerning the protection of political minorities in the local government district.

A further safeguard will be provided through the introduction of qualified majority voting, or weighted majority voting, for specific strategic council decisions, including decisions that have been the subject of a legitimate call-in. The support of 80% of council members present and voting will be required for a decision to be agreed. The decisions that will require a qualified majority

vote will again be specified in regulations, and those will be subject to the draft affirmative procedure in the Assembly.

Mr McGimpsey: Does the Minister agree that, under the Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland is a part of the kingdom for as long as the people of Northern Ireland so determine, that the only legitimate flag under the constitutional settlement is the Union flag and that that flag should therefore take precedence over all other flags?

Mr Durkan: Mr Speaker, I am not particularly sure of the relevance of that question to the original question. As Minister of the Environment, I am much more concerned about raising standards than raising flags.

Hydraulic Fracturing

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment whether any discussions are taking place between his Department and the developers proposing hydraulic fracturing. (AQO 4780/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials in both Department of the Environment (DOE) Planning Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency have previously met representatives from Tamboran and its consultants. The most recent meeting took place on 26 June 2013. At that meeting, Tamboran's plans to drill a deep bore hole to approximately 1,500 metres to obtain a core sample of the shale were outlined. It is my understanding that the purpose of the core sample is to determine the quantities of recoverable gas in the shale and that that will inform the commercial viability of Tamboran's project. As with previous meetings with Tamboran, my officials used the opportunity to reiterate that the Department of the Environment has a stringent suite of legislative, procedural and policy requirements that apply to such activities and that those will be robustly applied in the assessment of any planning or environment-related matters.

On the company's current exploration process, it was explained to Tamboran that there are certain permitted development rights not requiring planning permission for limited activity such as drilling bore holes or carrying out seismic surveys for a period of up to four months. However, it was explained that, if the exploration works are considered to require an environmental impact assessment, the current legislation makes it clear that, in such circumstances, permitted development rights do not apply.

My Department has not yet received any applications related to this proposed project. However, it is my understanding that hydraulic fracturing will not form part of any initial proposal. Any future proposals involving hydraulic fracturing will be required to carry out an environmental impact assessment.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. I note your direction earlier, Mr Speaker, to Mr McCrea about trying to steal my question. I suppose that it is nothing new for Mr McCrea to try to steal something from me.

Has either the Minister or his officials had any discussions with the Public Health Agency (PHA) on hydraulic fracturing?

Mr Durkan: Discussions are ongoing with a range of people, groups and organisations on hydraulic fracturing. To date, I have not met the PHA. As I said, I have met quite a few groups, some of which are opposed to and one or two of which are in support of hydraulic fracturing. I thank

the Member for the idea of meeting the Public Health Agency and undertake to do so in the coming months.

Ms Lo: Does the Minister agree that, although the US economy has received a huge boost through fracking, we in Ireland and the UK are very different from the USA, which has a huge hinterland in which to explore fracking? Here, any site that we explore will be very close to urban areas.

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Ms Lo. I agree entirely with what Ms Lo said. There have been benefits — albeit, in my opinion, short-term benefits — derived from hydraulic fracturing in the USA, but we are not blessed with the same geographical expanse. There is a distinct difference between the USA and Europe, and the way in which fracking is viewed in both continents highlights that perfectly. There is already huge opposition to fracking here in the North, despite the fact that, as I have said, there is currently no application. I assure Ms Lo that any application that comes will be fully scrutinised and rigorously upheld against planning policy. It will have to satisfy me or, I presume, whoever is the Environment Minister that it is 100% safe, both to people and, extremely importantly, to the planet.

Mr Wilson: When the Minister took up his post he is on record as saying that fracking would not happen on his watch. Given that some of the applications are likely to be article 31 applications, is he saying that he has already made his mind up, or might some of them happen on his watch, causing his green friends to see red at the promise he has broken?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Wilson. I think what I said was that it would not happen on my watch easily, and I mean that well and truly. Any decision will require full scientific evidence. In my opinion, that scientific evidence is not there now, and I cannot see it being there in the foreseeable future. Therefore, I cannot see fracking happening on my watch.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can I turn the question around? Will the Minister give us a categorical assurance that, in the absence of full scientific evidence proving that hydraulic fracturing is safe for animals, people and the wider environment, he will not allow it to take place anywhere in the North of Ireland?

Mr Durkan: In the absence of such evidence, I can categorically give the Member that assurance now.

Road Fatalities

3. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of the Environment how many road fatalities have occurred this year compared to the same period last year. (AQO 4781/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Police Service of Northern Ireland is responsible for the collection, recording and compilation of road casualty statistics, and a daily road traffic fatality update is published on the PSNI's website. There have been 40 fatalities so far this year, compared with 32 at the same point last year and 44 at the same point in 2011.

The most recent published factors that cause road deaths and serious injuries are for 2012. They were as follows: excessive speed having regard to the conditions, which resulted in eight deaths and 92 serious injuries; inattention

or attention diverted, which resulted in five deaths and 73 serious injuries; and driver or rider impaired by alcohol or drugs, which resulted in eight deaths and 59 serious injuries. Those are typically the key causation factors every year. My Department, within the framework of the Road to Zero campaign on road deaths, is taking actions to address all those issues, including, recently, the launch of a road safety campaign concerning the dangers of not wearing a seat belt.

3.15 pm

Mr Givan: Clearly, every fatality is something to be hugely regretted, as is the heartache that it brings to the families concerned. Compared with this time five years ago, we have made tremendous progress, but, obviously, it will concern the Minister that, compared with this time last year, the number of fatalities has increased. What assurances can he give the House that there will be a review of the communication strategy to ensure that it is effective and that the PSNI will target its resources in the areas where fatalities most often occur, which are rural roads as opposed to motorways?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. He hit the nail on the head: when we speak about statistics, it is easy to forget that we are talking about people who have lost their life and families who have lost their young ones. I take the issue of road safety extremely seriously and aim to build on the excellent work of successive previous Ministers in bringing down road deaths. There are many ways in which we can do that. Unfortunately, we have seen an increase this year. I am concerned that we have seen an increase in the number of cyclists who have lost their life this year. Therefore, I have instructed officials and we are looking at having a cyclist-specific ad or information campaign to increase awareness and reduce the likelihood of further accidents and fatalities. Last week, I launched an advertising campaign on seat belt wearing. That was based on evidence that, despite a huge improvement in recent years in the number of people in the North wearing a seat belt, over the past year or so we have seen more people not wearing them all the time. The advertising, education and information campaign run by DOE has proven statistically to be extremely effective: it gets into people's heads and stays in people's heads. I have no doubt that it has played and continues to play a major role in reducing the number of people losing their life on our roads.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware of research carried out by the health-based organisation Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) that points to a higher incidence of road traffic accidents in border areas? If so, will the Minister undertake to take a careful look at that research to inform the strategy for border areas?

Mr Durkan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question. I was not aware of that research. However, work is ongoing between my officials and our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland on the issue. One such piece of work will manifest itself in the coming months when I bring forward a Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill that will involve looking at the mutual recognition of penalty points and the equalisation of drink-driving limits in both jurisdictions. Those initiatives will play

an important role in reducing the number of deaths on both sides of the border.

Mr Dallat: I am aware that this subject is difficult for the Minister. He understands perhaps better than most the impact that such fatalities have on families. Is he satisfied that the cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland — the Road Safety Authority in particular — is being maximised?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I am content that the work being done between authorities on both sides of the border is good. I am content that it is beneficial. However, I am perhaps not content that it has been maximised. I bring to this job a determination that the benefit of such collaborative work is maximised, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that it is. The environment knows no borders. We share our air, we share our water and we share our roads, and I think that collaboration between me and my counterparts in the Republic is extremely important and is something that I will work hard on.

Eco-schools

4. Mr Rogers asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the uptake of the Eco-Schools programme. (AQO 4782/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In Northern Ireland, the Eco-Schools programme is operated by Tidy Northern Ireland, which is an environmental charity. It has grown from a baseline of 96 schools participating in April 2007 to 1,021 as at Friday 11 October 2013. That represents 85% of all schools in Northern Ireland.

Eco-Schools is a pupil-led initiative and involves a whole-school approach. Eco-Schools work through a simple seven-step approach as they implement behavioural change in the school and continually reduce their environmental impact. There are three levels of Eco-Schools award that schools can work towards. The awards criteria are closely linked to the seven steps. Schools can apply for bronze and silver award certificates, and the highest award takes the form of the internationally recognised Eco-Schools green flag. The Eco-Schools programme is one of continual reduction of the school's environmental impact, therefore, the green flag award requires renewal every two years.

There are 10 topics for Eco-Schools to choose from: litter, waste, energy, transport, healthy living, school grounds, biodiversity, water, climate change and global perspectives. Schools are not expected to address all 10 topics but would identify topics to be studied according to their own requirements. In order to achieve the green flag, schools are required to study one major and two minor topics.

I recently wrote to the 180 schools in the North still not involved in the Eco-Schools programme to encourage them to join. 2014 will be the twentieth anniversary of Eco-Schools, and I hope that we can achieve 100% take-up during the year. I encourage all MLAs to look at the uptake of Eco-Schools in their area.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Minister. You have written to the schools, but what else can be done by your Department to ensure that there is 100% uptake?

Mr Durkan: I have written to the schools that have not taken part in the Eco-Schools programme so far. Eco-Schools is the world's largest education programme, operating in 55 countries and involving 13 million schoolchildren. More importantly, Eco-Schools demonstrates actively that economic benefits can result from improved environmental behaviours. For example, there are now two schools in Northern Ireland — Ulidia Integrated College in Carrickfergus and Fairview Primary School in Ballyclare — that send no waste to landfill. That has come about as a direct outcome of work done through Eco-Schools. To that effect, DOE communications has developed a marketing communications plan to encourage the remaining 191 schools to join the programme. That is in tandem with work being done by the national operator Tidy Northern Ireland and its delivery partners.

I was about to say, before I ran out of time at the end of the last question, that I will take this opportunity to encourage all MLAs to look at uptake in their constituency and see whether they can help somehow and encourage schools to take part. I will certainly be to the fore in doing that, as, I think, Foyle has the worst uptake so far.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. The Eco-Schools programme presents a good opportunity for education and to promote environmental issues to young people. I believe that the programme will work very well as we work toward the EU's revised waste framework directive on the prevention and reduction of waste. On that basis, will the Minister outline whether his Department will make additional funding available to further enhance the programme?

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Brown for her question. This programme is extremely important in educating young people, which, itself, is extremely important. However, the real value is not only that it educates young people but that those young people go home and educate their parents. I am sure that those of us with children have been lectured by a child at some stage over what bin we should put what rubbish into. That is the beauty of this scheme, and that is why it is yielding such good results.

The current grant paid to Tidy Northern Ireland to deliver Eco-Schools is £85,000, which equates to 28p per pupil. That is considerably lower than in other jurisdictions. In Scotland, it is 60p; in Wales, it is 93p; and in the Republic of Ireland, it is £2.16. I will look at how more funding can be secured for this project, particularly as we go into the twentieth anniversary year, to try to push for more schools to take it up. I see using the money generated by the carrier bag levy as a possible way of doing that.

Mr McNarry: I welcome the Minister's comments on funding. If that comes about, it will be richly deserved. I also welcome his obvious enthusiasm for the scheme. To take it a step further, is his Department considering anything that might give schools additional incentives to participate and invest in this? Might any greater rewards be offered to schools that are already involved — for example, a super prize for the super school? I am not usually all that keen on green flags, but in this case I am; maybe there could be a super green flag.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McNarry for his question. What we should do, and are doing, is to get teachers, principals and children from schools that are in the programme to speak to those that are not. There are benefits for schools; not

just environmental benefits but economic benefits. Schools have seen their energy bills go down as a direct result. I have pointed out two schools that now send no waste to landfill and are, therefore, seeing savings.

I am interested in looking at how we can incentivise this. I believe in good, healthy competition, whether it is in respect of tidy schools, tidy streets or something else. Those are the kind of things that we need to restore civic pride in society and get our streets cleaned up again.

Planning Bill

5. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the passage of the Planning Bill. (AQO 4783/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am taking stock of the Planning Bill and the amendments made at Consideration Stage. As Members will be aware, there were two significant, complex and late amendments, which introduced new clauses 4 and 15 to the Planning Bill. Those clauses allow OFMDFM to designate economically significant planning zones and limit the right to take a judicial review against a planning decision taken by OFMDFM, the Department or, in future, councils.

Those amendments were the subject of concern for many Members when we debated them in June. Like my predecessor, I am particularly concerned that the amendments are not within the legislative competence of the Assembly. The legal advice obtained by the previous Minister from one of the top QCs in the UK, who specialises in planning, environmental and public law, states that the amendment curtailing the rights to judicial review is not compatible with article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The amendment removes the right to seek judicial review in cases where decisions are made outside of legal powers or where the decision was plainly unreasonable. It is a long-standing legal convention that judicial review is an appropriate mechanism to challenge such decisions. Additionally, the economically significant planning zone amendment does not contain exceptions for designated sites, such as those under the habitats directive, which could lead to infraction proceedings being taken against the UK.

I also have a number of other concerns, and in taking stock, it is important to listen to those parties that have an interest in the planning system. This is an important issue, and we need to get the legislation right.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time has almost gone again.

Mr Durkan: To that end, I have met and received representations from a range of key stakeholders. I have further meetings planned in the near future.

Mr Speaker: I will let the Member in for a very quick supplementary.

3.30 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I appreciate that, Mr Speaker. The Minister's predecessor in the House said that there had been no consultation whatsoever on those amendments. Can the Bill go forward on that basis?

Mr Durkan: I believe that the amendments that we are talking about are significant and should be subject to a full and rigorous public consultation to gauge the views of the public and key stakeholders. I am also concerned that the Environment Committee was not given the opportunity to scrutinise the amendments properly. I find that fact extremely disappointing, especially as they were not drafted overnight, and the Members who tabled them at the last minute sit on the Committee and had ample opportunity to bring them forward for discussion with their colleagues.

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Blood Donations: Judicial Review

Mr Speaker: Mr Kieran McCarthy has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Before I ask the Clerk to read the question, I remind Members that if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their place. I found some difficulty during Question Time with Members rising continually in their place. They seem to believe that it is enough if the Speaker looks down at them. Members need to rise continually in their place, irrespective of what area of the Chamber I may look at. I am reminding Members of what they should be doing to try to get in with a contribution. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary question. I will then call other Members who are on their feet to ask a supplementary. Of course, I will very much take account of the balance of parties within the Chamber.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the outcome of the judicial review regarding his ban on blood donation by gay men.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): There is no ban on blood donation by gay men per se. The lifetime ban is based on sexual behaviour, not sexual orientation. In the application for a judicial review on the matter, the judge took the view that it was unlikely that there was bias on my part. The judge has ruled that the decision on whether to maintain the lifetime ban is a matter for the Secretary of State for Health acting as the competent authority for the whole of the UK. The Secretary of State for Health will need to consider the ruling. The judge also ruled that it was a reserved matter by virtue of section 24(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The judge also took the view that the matter was controversial and cross-cutting and, therefore, should have been referred to the Executive for consideration. Contrary to inaccurate commentary, the judge did not take the view that maintaining a higher threshold in Northern Ireland itself was Wednesbury irrational. He did, however, find that Northern Ireland continuing to import tiny quantities of blood from Great Britain, which could contain some blood from men who sleep with men (MSM), was irrational in this context. That finding needs to be viewed in context, in light of the very small amounts of blood that we import and what additional risk that represents for recipients of blood in Northern Ireland.

I am considering the full judgement and its implications. For the present, the lifetime deferral on men who have sex with men donating blood remains in place in Northern Ireland. My priority as Health Minister is the safety of blood, continuity in the supply of safe blood and public confidence in the safety of blood.

Mr McCarthy: The judgement states that the Minister's decision was irrational and that he breached the ministerial code. Surely our Minister will acknowledge that this is a very serious case of discrimination against a section of our population. Will the Minister apologise? Will he lift the ban and stop taking idiotic judicial challenges, costing large sums of money —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCarthy: — that he knows he cannot win.

Mr Speaker: Order. Can we have the question, not further statements, from the Member?

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister give the Assembly and, indeed, the Northern Irish people an assurance that he is approaching all social issues in a rational, objective and evidence-based manner, rather than imposing his personal religious views on others? Surely, Mr Speaker, if the decision on the blood ban is today a matter for Jeremy Hunt across the water, why —

Mr Speaker: The Member should now finish.

Mr McCarthy: —was that not the case last week?

Mr Poots: I will respond to Mr McCarthy's speech, Mr Speaker. I am not sure what questions were in there. I will quote from the judge because I doubt whether the Member has read the ruling. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be allowed to answer.

Mr Poots: I will assist the Member by reading the ruling to him.

Mr McCarthy: You are wasting your time.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: Item 136 in the ruling says:

"Given these two options, and considering the reported difference in infection rates above, there are two reasonable responses and the one selected by the Minister is not Wednesbury unreasonable on these grounds."

Let us deal with that issue in a very calm and dignified way. The commentary that was put out this morning is wrong. That commentary, which has been put out by other Members in this House, is wrong. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: The irrationality that the judge was applying was the fact that we took any blood from the UK with the possibility that it could contain MSM blood. So I did not go far enough for the judge. If I had banned blood coming in from GB, the judge would have found the decision rational. Perhaps the Member would do himself a favour before he asks a question by reading the judgement and then he might understand the question that someone has asked him to put in.

Mr McCarthy: Apologise.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have questions to the Minister, not further statements.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I have read the judgement. Following the Minister's statement just over an hour ago that the issue is now effectively in the hands of Jeremy Hunt and the fact that, whether it is a tiny piece

of blood or a large supply of blood, the decision was found to be irrational and in breach of the ministerial code, will he now directly join the rest of us and the rest of society in ensuring and supporting that the ban is lifted?

Mr Poots: The Member may have read the judgement but it would appear that she clearly does not understand it. The judge has taken that decision out of my hands and has indicated that it is a decision for the United Kingdom Minister; the United Kingdom that Sinn Féin is very happy to belong to in this instance. It wants to defer to the British Minister to make the decision because it does not trust someone from Northern Ireland to carry it out.

I want to deal with the issue of prejudice.

Ms Ruane: You are prejudiced.

Mr Poots: Ms Ruane just claimed that I am prejudiced. The same legislation that applies today in Northern Ireland applies in the USA, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. I will pose a question. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: The vast majority of countries apply that legislation. So are all those people prejudiced or is the question that is being posed by others that I am prejudiced just a stupid one?

Mr Speaker: Once again, Members must rise in their place. I do not know what I need to do to get Members continually to rise in their place.

Mr Wells: The Minister has read a list of modern democracies where there is a ban on this particular form of blood being used. What contact has he had with the authorities in the Irish Republic, which have a similar view on the matter? It is ironical that the Members on the opposite Benches are asking us to ignore the views of those in the Irish Republic and to accept the views of the rest of the UK. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: Shortly after this issue came up, I wrote to the Minister in the Irish Republic who indicated that their position was the same as ours, that it was their intention to maintain that position and that they were not going to consider changing it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: In this instance, Sinn Féin is anything but a united Ireland party. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Fearghal McKinney.

Mr McKinney: Mr Speaker — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr McKinney: Mr Speaker, thank you. The judgment has been made, and the Minister has made a statement. He has been asked to apologise to the House; will he now take the opportunity to do so?

Mr Poots: I think that I have dealt with a number of the issues that Members raised, the number of nonsensical issues that Members raised and the inaccuracy of information that Members have been putting out. Perhaps it is for

those Members who have been putting out inaccurate information to the public to apologise to the House.

Mr Beggs: To address public concern that he might be allowing his personal views to cloud scientific advice, will the Minister publish the legal advice the Attorney General gave to him prior to losing the court case?

Mr Poots: Let us be quite frank about it: this is not an issue of religiosity or moral views; it is one of public safety. Indeed, the learned judge identified that it was an issue of public safety, and, again, I would encourage people to read the judgement. In paragraph 131, the learned judge states:

"It is clear from the SaBTO report that anal/oral male homosexual acts do increase the risk of acquiring blood borne disease. For example, in relation to HIV the report notes at page 68 in Appendix 5:

'UAPMP data from 2008 for previously undiagnosed HIV infections ... shows that the prevalence was higher in MSM (3.1% ...) compared with heterosexual attendees (0.35% ...)'"

That, Members, is a 900% increase in infection rates. Some Members might want to dismiss that or ignore safety issues, but I am responsible for people's health and well-being. People who receive blood need to be assured that it is safe.

In paragraph 132 — I am glad to be of assistance to Members in reading this to them — the judge went on to state:

"Later on the same page it continues to note that the Gay Mens Sexual Health Survey notes the prevalence of HIV between 8.6% and 13.7% which are much higher percentages than in other populations which were tested."

I rest my case.

Mr McCallister: The judge stated that the Minister's decision and actions were irrational and that he broke the ministerial code. Does the Minister think that that is an endorsement of his policy, a policy that, it turns out, he did not have the power to make?

Mr Poots: At that rate of going, neither did the Ministers in Scotland and Wales. The judge very clearly disagrees with the Department of Health on this issue, and it is a matter for others how they might wish to respond. Constitutional issues certainly arise.

If I broke the ministerial code, I did so unwittingly, but I suspect that every other Minister in the House has unwittingly broken the code —

Mr McCarthy: You broke it.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: — if it is as was designated by Lord Justice Treacy in this instance. I want to be absolutely clear and unequivocal about this. When Alex Attwood did not want to bring the Belfast metropolitan area plan to the Executive, I believe that that would have quite clearly broken the code. I look at issues that are in front of Mr O'Dowd, such as the common funding formula and the Dickson plan, and, under this ruling, Mr O'Dowd will break the ministerial code unless he brings those issues to the Executive first.

Mr McCartney: How do you know?

Mr Speaker: Order. Do not let us start a debate across the Chamber.

Mr Poots: Minister Ford wanted to change the insignia on Northern Ireland Prison Service uniforms, and our First Minister intervened to stop that happening. That would also have been a breach of the ministerial code. According to this judgement, there have been numerous breaches of the ministerial code that have applied. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: What the judge believes to be the appropriate ministerial code has come as news to us.

Ms Lo: Will the Minister leave behind his religious dogma and act in the best interests of our society to increase the volume of blood that is donated for all our patients?

Mr Poots: I am not sure whether the Member has ever met anyone who has received something in good faith that has gone wrong. Very sadly, one of our representatives passed away as a consequence of a health intervention that involved receiving contaminated material.

Let us be very clear: we are here to look after people's healthcare and we want to do that as safely as possible. If the Member was not listening to what the judge quoted in his ruling or to the fact that he did not identify bias, perhaps she would do herself a favour and read the actual judgement that has been passed, instead of passing judgement without reading it.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

3.45 pm

Mr Givan: I welcome paragraph 141, which makes it clear that there was no discriminatory practice in Northern Ireland as the policy applies to Northern Ireland. With regard to paragraph 150 of the judgement, will the Minister comment, in respect of the ministerial code, on the learned judge's opinion that because it generated a lot of publicity, it should, therefore, have been brought —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Givan: — to the Executive? What does that mean, particularly for the smaller parties in the Executive when it comes to how they conduct their business when they do not take decisions and retain the status quo?

Mr Speaker: Order. I must insist. Minister, please continue.

Mr Poots: That element of the judgement makes it very attractive to us not to challenge it. It may be a very interesting place for smaller parties in the Executive thereafter, based on the Treacy ruling. I suspect that most of the material in the in tray would, at some point, have to be brought before the Executive. Therefore, the independent decision-making that many Ministers have applied heretofore may be lost. I suspect that many of the people who are baying and crowing might be those who have most to lose as a consequence of Mr Justice Treacy's judgement on the issue.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree with me that screening, and not discriminating against our gay community, is the way to deal with making sure that our blood is safe?

Mr Poots: No; I agree with the Lord Justice. If he had not recommended that Jeremy Hunt had to make the decision,

I could have fulfilled quite easily the issue that he thought was irrational. So, I intend to agree with the judge, as opposed to Ms Ruane, in this instance. I agree that putting safety right at the top of the agenda is something that we should always do as opposed to introducing some sort of equality agenda over and above the safety of the people whom we serve. It must always be a priority to have safety first, long before we introduce the equality issues.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Minister accept or reject the High Court judge's ruling that his decision was irrational? Does he agree with that or does he reject it?

Mr Poots: The Member, quite clearly, is not challenging whether this is irrational on the basis of the decision that was taken. I am not sure whether the Member actually supports the concept of banning the blood coming in from Britain because that would be the basis of the irrational element. Perhaps the Member is endorsing the banning of blood coming in from Britain because it might contain some MSM blood, as that is what the judge was saying.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. That concludes this item of business.

Speaker's Business

Mr Speaker: Before Members leave the Chamber, I have a number of issues on Question Time to discuss. We need to get away from Members reading out supplementary questions. They end up almost like statements. I do not mind if Members want to keep notes, but reading out supplementary questions needs to stop.

Also, Members should not accuse other Members of stealing. I am referring to Mr Elliott. Members need to be careful of the terminology that they use in the Chamber when referring to stealing topical questions. That is wrong, and the terminology is also wrong. We need to be careful of the language that we use against other Members.

Topical questions are a new convention. I have always said that I will give some easement to Members as we bed down topical questions. That is why I allowed Mr McCrea to ask a supplementary question to his topical question. I did understand that a similar question was on the list of questions for oral answer, but I still allowed the supplementary to be asked. We have to be careful with the language that we use in the House.

Mr I McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In line with what you just said, when an assessment of topical questions is carried out, will you consider putting them after questions for oral answer rather than before to ensure that that issue does not arise at all?

Mr Speaker: Yes, and I have some sympathy with what the Member says. I assure him that we will be looking to make changes to a number of aspects of topical questions. We are also happy to take feedback from Members and parties — *[Interruption.]* Order. We are also happy to take feedback from Members and parties on how we should deal with topical questions.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you clarify the language used in Mr McCarthy's initial statement and in comments made by Ms Ruane from a sedentary position? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Yes, I will certainly read the Hansard report and come back to the Member directly. Members should be careful of the language that they use in the House against other Members. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On a separate matter — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: — what role does the Assembly and the Speaker's Office have to play when a High Court judge deems that a Minister is in breach of the code?

Mr Speaker: I can say this to the Member directly: absolutely no role. We looked at the matter this morning with our legal team and the Business Office, and there is no role whatsoever.

Mr Elliott: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I accept your ruling around the language issue. I was never implying that Mr McCrea or anyone else was stealing property from me whatsoever.

Mr Speaker: I appreciate what the Member said, and he now has it on the record.

I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next item of business.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin]
in the Chair)*

Private Members' Business

Bowel Cancer

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

Mr Spratt: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the importance of early diagnosis of bowel cancer in saving lives; commends the success of the existing screening programme; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider extending the age range that can access screening to incorporate a larger proportion of the population.

It gives me pleasure to introduce the motion to the House. If I have an interest to declare, it is that, just 20 months ago, I was diagnosed with bowel cancer. I thank the Minister for being in the Chamber. I express my deep personal gratitude to the surgeons who have treated me over the past 20 months and to the fantastic staff in Belfast City Hospital, the Mater Hospital and the cancer centre at the City Hospital.

I also declare an interest and make no apology for supporting the work of Bowel Cancer UK in Northern Ireland. I think it is the only bowel cancer charity here; I am not aware of any others. Certainly, it has upped the ante in its work in Northern Ireland. I am deeply grateful for the support of all parties around the Chamber on that. Bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in Northern Ireland. I have been working closely, as I said, with Bowel Cancer UK to increase awareness of the disease. I sincerely hope that more people will go to their doctor if they suspect that they have symptoms.

I would like to begin by saying that, as with all cancers, early diagnosis is critical. Everyone needs to be made aware of the symptoms to look out for and encouraged to seek advice and treatment from their GP. At this point, I would like to list the symptoms in order to increase awareness. It must be remembered that the symptoms do not automatically mean that a person has bowel cancer; they are common to many other illnesses. However, it is important to consult a doctor if any or all of the symptoms are present. They include bleeding from the rectum; a change in bowel habit lasting three weeks or more; unexplained weight loss; extreme tiredness for no obvious reason; or a pain or lump in the stomach.

Many people are embarrassed to go to their GP and talk to them about bowel health in particular. I have to say that it is really tragic that so many people lose their life every year simply because they are too embarrassed to broach the subject. In many cases, it is men who find themselves in that position. It is so important to realise that doctors are professional and deal with all aspects of health. They will not think any differently of a patient with bowel problems from how they would with any other problem or condition

that might be presented to them. I urge anyone who thinks that they might have bowel cancer to see their GP immediately and not to leave it until it is too late.

I commend the Department, through the Minister, for the roll-out of the screening programme. As many Members will know, a test kit is currently sent to the home address of everyone in the 60 to 74 age bracket. Although, the test takes only a few minutes, it can certainly save your life. Often, there are no symptoms in the early stages of the disease. Many people are diagnosed purely as a result of taking part in the screening programme. I am sure that many lives have been saved as a result of early diagnosis through the programme.

It is highly regrettable that the uptake is low and is not as high as it should be. There is strong evidence to suggest that bowel cancer screening can reduce mortality. It is a shame, as bowel cancer is very treatable if detected in its early stages. To be able to reduce bowel cancer mortality by 16%, an uptake rate of 60% is required. Currently, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not meet that target. In Northern Ireland, the rate of uptake is 40% for men and 47% for women. There is evidence to show that that figure is considerably lower for young people, those who live in deprived areas and ethnic minority communities.

How do we tackle the issue? The active involvement of GPs and primary care is integral to improving the uptake of screening. Currently, primary care practitioners are not involved in the bowel care or cancer screening programmes but will receive a copy of the results and are notified of those who do not deal with the screening process. GPs are perfectly positioned to encourage individuals of screening age to look out for the kit and to instigate conversations about bowel cancer and the importance of early detection.

4.00 pm

Studies have demonstrated the difference that GP involvement can make in improving screening uptake. The current arm's-length approach, whereby eligible individuals are sent a standard invitation letter and, subsequently, a reminder letter if they have not returned the kit within four weeks, is not sufficient in itself to ensure the uptake of screening. Bowel cancer screening programmes require a dual and joined-up approach. I suggest that, if GPs were to send out letters of endorsement to patients, it would reinforce the importance of returning the testing kits.

I call on the Department, via the Public Health Agency, to encourage greater participation in the screening programme by building on last year's public awareness campaign. Public awareness of the benefits and importance of screening is crucial in increasing participation rates and assisting individuals to make informed choices. So far, the Be Clear on Cancer campaign and the Detect Cancer Early campaign in England and Scotland respectively have demonstrated some success, but there is still a lack of awareness about bowel cancer screening. Such campaigns must be regularly sustained until participation rates have increased and are maintained. Targeted and tailored interventions aimed at low-uptake groups to meet specific needs are also required. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot be taken, if the 60% target is to be reached.

According to figures released by Bowel Cancer UK, 95% of diagnoses relate to people over 50. As I said, the current screening programme targets the 60 to 74 age group. In my view, it would be worth looking at lowering the target age to 50, because that would allow more cases to be detected and treated. In my view, the early detection of more cases of bowel cancer will not only save lives but mean a lot to the National Health Service's financial resources.

I want, again, to make some personal comments about the treatment that is available. I have to say to the Minister that, when the critical chips are down — I have had three serious critical operations over the past 20 months — our Northern Ireland hospitals and health service are second to none. I urge the Minister — I know that there are financial restraints — to bring the screening age down to 50, to raise awareness and to sustain an awareness campaign, because that will pay dividends in the long term by helping to decrease the number of people with bowel cancer. I compliment the Minister for having conversations with Bowel Cancer UK and, indeed, other organisations. I know that he has given serious attention to this. I commend the motion to the House and hope that there will be support right around the Chamber.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome this important debate. I commend the proposer for tabling the motion and thank him for his honesty on the issue.

As has been stated, bowel cancer is the third most common cancer. Every year, approximately 1,000 people are diagnosed with the disease and 400 people die from it. Over 80% of people with bowel cancer are over 60. As has been pointed out, men and women from 60 to 69 years of age were eligible for bowel cancer screening, and that was extended in April 2012 to people up to 71 years of age. The Minister has stated his intention that, by 2014-15, the screening programme will be extended to the age of 74 for men and women. As the proposer rightly pointed out, a testing kit is available to test at home, and it is my understanding that the budget for bowel cancer in 2010-11 was £3.5 million.

All that having been said, there is evidence that bowel cancer in particular can run in families, and around 20% of people who develop bowel cancer have a close relative or a second-degree relative who has also had bowel cancer. It is estimated that, if you have a close relative with bowel cancer, your risk of getting bowel cancer is doubled. So, as well as the home test kit — or the FOBt kit as it is called — an additional screening test will be rolled out in 2016. We understand that that includes inviting people at age 55 to have a one-off flexible test to examine the lower bowel with a camera. We have looked at other models. For example, the Scottish screening programme is available for those aged between 50 and 74 years. In Wales, it is between 60 and 74 years. In England, it is available from the ages of 60 to 69, and screening programmes are to be extended to those aged 70 to 75.

As the proposer rightly said, Bowel Cancer UK presented a shocking picture of delays in diagnosis and failures in screening, especially among younger bowel cancer patients. Bowel cancer screening, as the proposer said, should be, as a responsibility, subject to ongoing performance management and audit. The number of people aged under 50 who are diagnosed with bowel cancer is slowly rising, and we cannot or should not

lose sight of that figure. Younger patients are not aware of the symptoms, and that is becoming very apparent. Women experience longer delays in diagnosis, and it is estimated that 42% of women diagnosed had been to their doctor more than five times before being referred to a specialist. That, in itself, is a figure that we cannot lose sight of. A number of recommendations came out of the Bowel Cancer UK report. They were that we needed a bowel disease decision toolkit, if you like, a revision of the clinical guidance that exists and adequate screening and surveillance and that we needed to target younger bowel cancer patients and give them better access to services. We need to take those recommendations seriously, particularly when we see the rising levels of bowel cancer across our society. I suggest that we consider the recommendations that have come out of the report. I commend and support the motion.

Mr McKinney: As health spokesperson for the SDLP, I support the motion. Bowel cancer is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in Northern Ireland, and I commend the proposer of the motion for bringing this important issue to the attention of the House. We have heard and will hear further of the personal journey of colleagues, and I thank them for being prepared to discuss so publicly such a personal issue and, in doing so, help to raise awareness of the disease.

There can be few things as traumatic as learning of a cancer diagnosis. It is seldom a sudden diagnosis, with people, as Mr Spratt identified, potentially being aware for some time of feeling ill but even then delaying taking action. As we have heard, there is also the added waiting time between seeking a doctor's appointment and getting one and the subsequent delay in getting further tests and, eventually, a result. Accompanying that is angst and worry, sleepless nights and, often, despair that can extend beyond the individual to family and friends. However, thanks to major developments in science and testing, we are in a position to welcome particular advances in the detection of bowel cancer.

It is worth repeating the statistics. Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in Northern Ireland after lung and breast cancers, with over 80% of cases occurring in people over 60. Importantly, treatment is most effective when delivered early, so a robust screening programme is an appropriate method to ensure early detection and the associated positive outcomes. Indeed, regular bowel cancer screening has been shown to reduce the risk of bowel cancer mortality by 16%. I would endorse any move that would make the uptake more effective.

The UK National Screening Committee, which advises the four UK Health Departments on screening programmes, has recommended that bowel cancer screening is offered to all men and women over 50. Since April 2012, men and women in Northern Ireland up to the age of 71 have been eligible for bowel cancer screening programmes, and we know that screening will be extended to include all eligible men and women aged 50 to 74 from January 2014. I welcome the plan to increase those eligible for screening. With annual recorded cases of bowel cancer in excess of 1,000, the expansion of screening should be a priority for the Department. I am mindful that the increased number of people being screened will increase the pressure on the services treating and caring for those who have received a bowel cancer diagnosis. Therefore, I specifically ask

the Minister what processes and procedures have been put in place to facilitate the expansion of this screening programme.

As increased numbers of people seek access to the services offered by our expert medical facilities, we must ensure that the resources needed to offer necessary treatments are in place. My constituency of South Belfast has a world-class cancer centre staffed by highly trained and dedicated people. I join my party colleague in paying tribute to the excellent services that they provide. As we raise awareness of this disease, we must increase the provision of services offered by the NHS in this regard.

Worryingly, Belfast's rates of bowel cancer are above the Northern Ireland average. In conjunction with raising awareness, I acknowledge that lifestyle factors can contribute significantly. Diet, exercise and weight can play a role in the prevalence of the disease. To that end, there is a need for the creation of clear public health messages, and I encourage the Minister in that regard. The public must be educated in ways that they can reduce their personal risk factors and be able to readily access robust information to allow them to make informed choices about their lifestyle and the services available to them.

We must seek to provide a holistic approach to the treatment of bowel cancer; an approach that focuses on prevention and cure. I commend those behind the motion, which I support.

Mr Beggs: I, too, thank Mr Spratt for bringing the matter to the Floor and for sharing his personal experience so that others may benefit. We must all thank him for that.

Bowel cancer is indeed the third most common cancer after breast cancer and lung cancer. It affects a large number of people — 1,000 patients a year in Northern Ireland, with 400 people a year dying from the disease. Of the cases identified, 80% are in the older population — 65-plus. One of the aspects of the disease that makes it particularly difficult to treat and diagnose early is that the symptoms develop late. When those late symptoms develop, it limits the treatment that may yet be possible. That is why screening is so important, so that earlier diagnosis can be possible in more cases. Some 20% of cases are below the age of 60, and I will come to that issue later.

On 22 April 2010, the Northern Ireland bowel cancer screening programme began. It was launched by the then Minister Michael McGimpsey for people aged 60 to 69, and, as others have said, that has now been extended. However, the early detection of the disease can result in a 90% success rate, whereas, if the disease is detected in its latter stages, only 6% survive for five-plus years. It is important for everyone to use that chance to have the disease detected early. As was said, unfortunately, only 40% of males and 47% of females in Northern Ireland take up the offer that is available free through the health service. More people must take up that option.

4.15 pm

In June 2009, the acting Chief Medical Officer said that, from January 2014, the programme would be further extended to include all eligible men and women aged 50 to 74. I hope that that will be the case shortly and that we will be able to widen out that age bracket. It would be helpful if the Minister could indicate the schedule for widening the planned detection programme.

I have looked at the number of cases, incidence rates and average number of cases a year in the figures published for 2007-2011, and I notice that the peak age falls within the age bracket 75 to 97. It would be helpful to know why that age group is not being tested and whether there is a hope that, by testing earlier, all cases will be caught and later incidence of the disease will not happen.

As others have said, the symptoms are not commonly talked about, but it is important to put them on the record and to make the public aware of them: bleeding from the rectum; a change in bowel habits lasting three weeks or more; unexplained weight loss; extreme tiredness; and perhaps a lump or pain in your tummy. If you are concerned about any of those symptoms, go and see your GP and be tested. The earlier you go, the better the outcomes.

Bowel Cancer UK's Never Too Young campaign states that testing should be widened to include people under 50 years of age. It said that people with a high risk of bowel cancer frequently got the appropriate test to rule out bowel cancer as a later possibility rather than an earlier one. It wants bowel cancer to be ruled out first, not last. It also wants adequate screening and surveillance to be put in place, particularly with families that have a higher risk and there is a strong family history of the disease. Therefore, we must concentrate on those high-risk factors.

The majority of the younger population is unaware of bowel cancer and the fact that it could affect them. We must increase their awareness so that younger people under the age of 50 or 60 who have the symptoms seek help. It is concerning that 20% of females and 10% of men had to wait more than a year before being diagnosed by a specialist. It is important that there is early diagnosis and speedy referral through the health system so that early treatment can occur.

As others have said, diet can be a problem. That is under our control, and we can lessen the likelihood of difficulties. Being overweight, lack of exercise, inappropriate diet, high alcohol intake and smoking all increase the likelihood of the disease.

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

Mr Beggs: It is important that we use the screening and adopt a lifestyle or improve our lifestyle to lessen the risk of the disease.

Mr McCarthy: My party fully supports the motion. I take the opportunity to congratulate Jimmy Spratt and his colleagues for tabling it. I thank Mr Spratt in particular for describing the suffering that he has had to endure. We are delighted and thank God that Jimmy is with us and continues to improve. We hope that you continue to improve and will be with us for as long as possible.

The debate may be about the specific matter of bowel cancer and the associated challenges of anticipating and dealing with it, but, in having it, we highlight more general issues of further investment in prevention and, in particular, good public health and early intervention.

As has been said, bowel cancer is the third most common form of cancer in Northern Ireland behind lung and breast cancer. That is also the pattern in many other societies. Again, as was said earlier, around 1,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer in Northern Ireland every

year. As I understand it, some 80% of those people are over 60 years of age, so there was logic in introducing screening first for men and women between 60 and 70 and then subsequently extending that to some over 70. In some other societies, screening is offered to those under 60, particularly those who may be assessed as being at higher risk. In Scotland, testing is available for those between 50 and 74. It is generally accepted that screening should be linked to risk and that resources should be most effectively and efficiently targeted. However, in the case of bowel cancer, the potential for saving lives through early detection is so significant that there is evidence for a more general approach.

It should be stressed that screening is not clear-cut diagnosis. It can rule out bowel cancer but it shortlists only those who require further tests. Consequently, there is a need for rapid follow-up, for waiting lists and times to be short, and for sufficient resources to be deployed.

I stress that prevention is much more than early detection. The public can take action to reduce any undue risks through, for instance, an intake of less alcohol, stopping smoking, improving diet and promoting greater exercise etc. Public health prevention and early intervention should be common themes across the health service. They hold considerable potential for making better use of scarce resources, allowing greater investments in healthcare and improving health outcomes more generally. It would be useful if the Minister could update the House on his progress in rebalancing the health service in that regard.

It is a matter of concern that there are significant variances in outcomes and speed of intervention in different parts of Northern Ireland. My colleague the MP for East Belfast Naomi Long wrote to the Minister recently to highlight that the one-year cancer survival rate in the Belfast Trust, which is 59%, is lower than the Northern Ireland average of 63%. Those lie considerably behind the best rates in Europe. Time frames for those waiting for diagnostic tests in Belfast are well below the average, at 85% compared with the rest of Northern Ireland at 93%. Also, only 73% of patients treated in Belfast receive their first treatment for cancer within 62 days of an urgent GP referral, compared with the Northern Ireland average of 81%. The percentage of people who receive their first treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat is also lower in east Belfast, at 95%, compared with the rest of Northern Ireland as a whole at 97%. As Members will appreciate, the speed with which patients receive their first treatment —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member of his time.

Mr McCarthy: — is critical.

I commend all the health professionals for the excellent work that they do on cancer. I hope that that good work continues. Hopefully, we can eradicate the disease altogether sooner rather than later.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion. I put on record our thanks to my colleague Jimmy Spratt for opening the debate. I think that we all welcome him back to work. It is great to see him looking so well as he fights that terrible disease and continues to represent his constituents. We wish him well for the work that he carries out on their behalf.

Cancer continues to be a very real problem across our country today. The motion is a useful opportunity to highlight the condition and actively explore ways in which we can try to reduce the numbers of sufferers and, importantly, support those who have bowel cancer. I know that a lot of good work is ongoing in support of people with cancer, and I know that Minister Edwin Poots has taken an active interest in this issue. We need to ensure that the provision of services is of the highest quality for people diagnosed with cancer, and we need to ensure that early detection is always to the fore in our communities.

Although bowel cancer mortality rates have decreased overall in the UK since the 1970s, largely due to earlier detection and better diagnosis, there is still room for improvement in helping to bring these figures even lower. Everyone in this House will, sadly, have known someone who has suffered and has passed away due to cancer, and it is imperative that we all as individuals and elected representatives play our part in raising awareness of bowel cancer through encouraging early detection as well as prevention measures. Support is important not only for people who directly suffer from the condition but equally as important is to ensure that support is in place for the families and carers of those sufferers. It is essential that respite care is in place for people who are dealing with the sufferers right across Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute and commend the many charities and, indeed, many of the volunteers in those charity organisations who work with cancer sufferers and their families daily in providing practical, medical and emotional support at such a serious time for everyone with this terrible condition.

As with many areas in health, I feel that education could be improved and targeted better in our communities through public awareness campaigns and outreach programmes to raise awareness of this condition, of its symptoms and of measures to decrease the chances of cancer developing. Health promotion and public awareness campaigns to encourage healthier living all have a key role to play in helping to tackle bowel cancer. Encouraging a healthier lifestyle, better diets and exercise, reducing smoking and alcohol consumption are all measures that should be worked on and fully encouraged. I, therefore, call upon the Minister to continue to explore ways of extending the age range of people who access screening for this condition. My constituency of North Down has a relatively high level of cancer diagnosis. I, therefore, fully encourage the extension of the screening programme throughout Northern Ireland. I support the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, commend Mr Spratt and his colleagues for bringing this motion to the House. Mr Spratt very eloquently talked about his personal journey with bowel cancer and he has certainly raised awareness in this House and with the wider public. He is to be commended for that.

At this stage in the debate, most of what can be said has been said, but it is important to reiterate some of those points. As has been stated, bowel cancer is one of the biggest and most common cancers in the North. One thousand people are diagnosed a year with it, and 400 people die from it. The effectiveness of screening and the early detection of this illness cannot be overemphasised. It is very important that the Public Health Agency, the Health and Social Care Board, the Business Services

Organisation and the trusts continue to work together to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to offer bowel cancer screening. Regular screening has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from bowel cancer by 16%. A screening test cannot tell whether a person has bowel cancer, but it does sort people into two groups: those who do not need any more tests; and those who have further tests. Bowel cancer is also strongly related to age, and it has been stated that 80% of people who get bowel cancer are over 60. One of the main purposes of the motion, apart from raising awareness, is to ensure that the age range is extended to include more people, and I think that that is very important. There is a real need to increase the uptake of screening. The 50 to 74 age group has been mentioned, and I think that it is important that that age range is included.

4.30 pm

The uptake is low, as Mr Spratt stated — 40% of men and 47% of women. There are preventative measures, which have been mentioned, such as a healthy diet, exercise and maintaining a healthy weight. Smoking and alcohol can cause particular problems that can lead to instances of bowel cancer. In my constituency, the incidence of bowel cancer is quite high. For instance, in 2009, 60 cases of bowel cancer were diagnosed.

I will talk about the effectiveness of screening. I received a phone call last week from a very good friend of mine who lives on the Isle of Lewis. As a direct result of the screening programme in Scotland, he has just been diagnosed with bowel cancer. He started his treatment last Tuesday, so I wish him well. I think that it is important that if screening is to be extended, there is an education process that goes with it to ensure that people are very much aware that it continues.

Ms Brown: I also support the motion. Due to the serious nature of the topic that my colleague Jimmy Spratt has brought to the House, I do not apologise for repeating many of the statistics that have been mentioned. Statistics tell us that one in 20 people in Northern Ireland will be diagnosed with bowel cancer in their lifetime. In fact, over 1,000 people on average are diagnosed with bowel cancer every year, with 400 people dying. Although that figure is particularly startling, the situation is perhaps worse, given that bowel cancer is a treatable disease and that many people go on to live normal lives after treatment. That means that the advantages of extending the programme to include a larger section of the population than is included at present are significant.

Bowel cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in Northern Ireland, along with lung and breast cancer. Although I welcome the success of the screening programme to date, I feel that perhaps there is an opportunity to further fight cancer by extending the existing age limits of the current screening programme. I am aware that the current programme is available to those who are aged between 60 and 71 and that, by April 2014, it will be increased to include those who are aged 74. However, on the advice of the UK National Screening Committee, it was recommended that a screening programme be put in place for all those who are aged 50 and over. I would like to see that recommendation become policy as soon as possible. It is a small step that has potentially great benefits.

As with many forms of cancer, the chances of successfully treating the disease increase dramatically with early detection. Given that, in many cases, there are no evident symptoms, it is understandable that many people are completely unaware that they are carrying or developing this deadly disease in their bodies. That is why I am a great supporter of regular screening programmes, and I believe that we should be doing more to educate all age groups on the benefits of availing themselves of a screening service. Awareness is very powerful. I know of one gentleman in particular who confessed to me that he eventually gave way to his wife's nagging — that was his word, not mine — and completed the test, which then led to treatment for bowel cancer. In that case, there were no symptoms, so I think that there is a very powerful message out there. I encourage families to talk about the subject and to take the test, as it could save lives.

The five-year survival rate for people who are diagnosed at the earliest stage of the disease is over 90%, yet fewer than 10% of people are diagnosed at that stage. Research has shown that screening can reduce the risk of bowel cancer by 16%. In addition, a higher percentage — 35% — of bowel cancers detected through screening are more likely to be found at the earlier Dukes A stage than those that are not detected through screening. Individuals who are diagnosed at that early stage of bowel cancer are more responsive to treatment and have more chance of surviving than those who are diagnosed later. Effective screening is therefore crucial to preventing individuals from dying prematurely from bowel cancer. I fully support the motion.

Mr Rogers: I support the motion and commend the Member who proposed it. I, like you, Mr Spratt, know exactly what it means when you are told that you have been diagnosed with cancer. Your life goes into fast forward. It flashes in front of you. At times, you are planning your funeral. Then you hit the pause button and say, "I am going to fight this. I am too young. My family is too important to me." Until you get your head around it, that is it.

For too long, cancer was one of those diseases that was not talked about. In the country, they talked about "the big C", and "the big C" was hush-hush. This debate helps to stamp out the stigma by talking about it. On such a day, I think of my many friends who are on that cancer journey. My thoughts and prayers are with them. It is a difficult journey, but stay positive and keep fighting. Today is about getting that message out. With access to screening, early detection can be made, resulting in many cancer survivors and positive stories.

Cancer is a very common disease and has visited the majority of families in my area. South Down has a high incidence of cancer. As other Members said, bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in Northern Ireland, with over 400 people every year losing their life to it and over 1,000 cases annually. The Chamber needs to send out a clear message to the public today. We need to encourage people to come forward and get tested, as early diagnosis saves lives. When got in time, treatment for bowel cancer can be 90% successful and can increase life expectancy by five years. The screening programme is open to people between the ages of 60 and 69, who are the most vulnerable group. I urge everyone who is eligible for screening to avail themselves of that service. I call on Minister Poots to review our various screening

programmes. In the case of bowel cancer, the screening programme needs to be extended to everyone between the ages of 50 and 74. That would bring us very much in line with what is happening in Scotland. We are all aware of the challenges associated with Transforming Your Care, but we must cut through the bureaucracy to ensure that everyone gets the same chance that I got when I was diagnosed.

I understand how distressing and life-changing a cancer diagnosis can be. The impact is felt by the person concerned and his or her family. The Member who spoke previously said that we need to talk about it. I do not know whether it is a man thing, but men are not good at talking about their health. Hopefully, today will be another chance for men to pluck up the courage and go and get that test. My test was a simple blood test. We must provide services that support the patient and the family circle. The family, as caregivers, need to feel that they can access services that provide information that can help them to help the patient on his or her cancer journey. Time is of the essence. Having been diagnosed quickly, it is important that treatment follow quickly. No matter where the cancer begins, it can travel through the body in a short time.

I pay tribute to the National Health Service for the expert care that our family received. I have to thank Dr Dempsey and his team for the treatment that our daughter received in the children's haematology unit, some 20 years ago. I am thankful for my treatment, which I received at Craigavon Area Hospital and the cancer centre at the City Hospital. The dedicated and well-trained staff in those hospitals played a major role in the successful outcomes for our family. I acknowledge all those who help people on their cancer journey, especially those who care for those who are in their final days. That level of care should be available to all faced with a diagnosis of bowel cancer. We must ensure that cancer units receive the support that they need to continue to provide vital care to patients.

In conclusion, my hope is that today's debate not only highlights the issue of bowel cancer and helps increase awareness of the disease in Northern Ireland but gets the message out that people can survive cancer with an early diagnosis and good medical care, and go on to live for many years.

Mr Gardiner: At the outset, I thank Mr Spratt for bringing the motion to the House. I welcome it, because my mother and two sisters died from cancer. We know as a family what it is like to live with that.

Bowel cancer incidence is strongly related to age. More than 23,000 men and women between the ages of 60 and 80 are diagnosed with the illness each year in the United Kingdom. The highest incidence rates are among older men and women. In the United Kingdom between 2008 and 2010, 73% of bowel cancer cases were diagnosed in people aged 65 and over. Age-specific incidence rates increase sharply from the age of 50, with the highest rate in the 85-plus age group.

The variation between the incidence of bowel cancer in men and women is widest between the ages of 67 and 74 when, for every 10 women diagnosed with bowel cancer, there are 17 men diagnosed with the disease. The differential narrows as age increases. At the age of 85, for every 10 women diagnosed with the disease, there are 15

men diagnosed. Between 2008 and 2010, 26% of bowel cancer cases occurred in the 60 to 69 age group.

In England, men and women are offered bowel cancer screening at two-year intervals between the ages of 60 and 69, though that is gradually being extended to include people aged 70 to 74. In Scotland, men and women are offered screening from the ages of 50 to 74. In Wales, men and women are offered screening from the ages of 60 to 74. In Northern Ireland, men and women aged 60 to 71 are offered screening every two years.

The most recent data for 2000-04 shows that across Europe, the incidence rates for bowel cancer are around 11% higher for men living in more deprived areas compared with the least deprived, though no significant differences are reported for women. I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on any evidence in Northern Ireland for bowel cancer rates being higher in socially deprived areas.

There is one interesting blip in the statistics. Between 1998 and 2003, the European incidence rates for bowel cancer decreased by 4% in men and 6% in women. I would be interested in hearing the Minister's views on that blip. Is it explained partly by bowel cancer screening programmes developing after that date and more cases being picked up? However, it does not explain the rate being lower than in the period before.

In conclusion, I support the motion, and I encourage the Minister to make a commitment to replicate the situation in Scotland where men and women are offered screening from the age of 50 to 74. I welcome the motion being brought before the House.

Mr McCallister: There is probably not a Member in the Chamber who has not been touched in some way by cancer, whether it is through a loved one or close friend who has been affected. Indeed, the very moving way that Mr Spratt detailed his own journey through it is to be commended, and it is good to have him back working away and fighting fit again. I think that it is a testament to his personality and to the marvellous treatment that he received.

Some of the key issues that I want to touch on during the debate are how we get our participation levels up and how we start pushing that. Other colleagues have set out the levels — 40% for men and 47% for women. How do we keep pushing those up year on year? Very importantly, how do we identify some of the higher risk groups? How do we identify some of the groups that are not even participating at the average level?

How do we engage with those groups and start to change the dynamic in the numbers who participate in screening?

4.45 pm

As other Members have said, in virtually everything that our health service does, there are huge advantages in early diagnosis. That is why it is key that we get the screening numbers up, that we get early and correct diagnosis and that we look at extending that to match best practice in other parts of the UK and Europe and, indeed, around the world. A key question is how we boost detection rates and extend participation levels at both ends of the age spectrum. I will be keen to hear whether the Minister will outline any plans and talk about availability, how much it would cost, and whether he thinks that it is an

avenue worth pursuing. The message from this debate is that the Assembly is telling the Minister that we are very supportive of going down the road of looking at whether we can bring forward the age at which people are screened. It would be encouraging to hear that the Minister is sympathetic to that.

Screening has a huge part to play. Many people are unaware of the symptoms and they need to get that screening done. We have to look at the setting in which screening can be carried out and how we make contact. Members have raised the issue that, historically, men are very bad at linking into their health. We see that across a range of health issues, from cancers to mental health. On a variety of things, men are just not good at engaging at the required level.

We need to look at other factors, too. Our Public Health Agency has a huge role in tackling the challenges of lifestyle, diet, alcohol and lack of exercise. Those are all contributory factors that we have to look at improving to prevent illness and cancers, while keeping up screening participation and making sure that, when there is a problem, we diagnose it early.

There has been a literally unanimous message from around the House that this is a worthwhile debate on a motion that is very worthy of our support.

Mr Easton: The Northern Ireland bowel cancer screening programme was set up by the Public Health Agency in April 2010. The aim of the programme is to detect bowel cancer at an early stage, when there are better chances of treatment being effective. Bowel cancer is the second most common type of cancer found in men and women in Northern Ireland. About one in 20 people will develop bowel cancer in their lifetime.

Bowel cancer is more common in older people, with around 80% of bowel cancers occurring in people over 60. Bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in both men and women in Northern Ireland. There are more than 1,000 new diagnoses and over 400 deaths in Northern Ireland each year. If bowel cancer is detected at an early stage, there is a much greater chance that treatment will be successful.

In England, bowel cancer is the third most common type of cancer. In 2009, 41,142 new cases of bowel cancer were registered in the UK. A total of 18,431 cases were diagnosed in women, making it the second most common cancer in women, after breast cancer. Some 22,711 cases were diagnosed in men, making it the third most common cancer in men, after prostate and lung cancer. Approximately 72% of bowel cancer cases develop in people who are over 65. Two thirds of bowel cancers develop in the colon, with the remaining one third developing in the rectum.

If bowel cancer is detected at a very early stage, treatment can be 90% successful. That means that around 90 deaths could be prevented across Northern Ireland each year. Screening can also pick up polyps, which are clumps of cells that are not cancerous but some of which may turn into cancer if they are not removed. If polyps are picked up at an early stage, they can be removed easily before that happens.

Exactly what causes cancer to develop inside the bowel is still unknown, but certain risk factors have been identified.

They include: eating a high-fat diet; having a bowel condition such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis; having a family history of bowel cancer; alcohol misuse; smoking; or obesity. The initial symptoms of bowel cancer include: blood in your stools or bleeding from the rectum; a change in your normal bowel habits, which persists for more than six weeks, such as diarrhoea, constipation or passing stools more frequently than usual; abdominal pains; and unexplained weight loss.

In some cases, bowel cancer can cause an obstruction in the bowel. Symptoms of bowel obstructions include a feeling of bloating, usually around the navel, abdominal pain, constipation or vomiting. As bowel cancer progresses, it can sometimes cause bleeding inside the bowel, which eventually will mean that your body will not have enough red blood cells. That is known as anaemia and symptoms include fatigue and breathlessness.

It is becoming increasingly important that the very successful screening process continues and that we understand that bowel cancer can strike at any age. It is, therefore, vital that services continue, with access to screening for extended age ranges where a wider proportion of the population can avail themselves of the screening service, and that we can continue to save lives.

I commend the proposer of the motion for bringing this forward today and for telling us about his personal journey.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the opportunity to speak today about this very important issue, the importance of the early diagnosis of bowel cancer in saving lives and the plans that my Department has to extend the age range of the bowel cancer screening programme. I commend the Member for his introduction and for his bravery in fighting this awful illness.

It is vital for everyone to understand that early detection of cancer greatly increases the chances of successful treatment. We all need to be aware of the warning signs or symptoms of cancer and take prompt action to get anything that is suspicious checked out by a GP and referred for further assessment. Therefore lumps, whether breast lumps or testicular lumps, sores that fail to heal, abnormal bleeding, persistent indigestion and chronic hoarseness, or anything that feels or looks abnormal, needs to be checked out.

Population screening programmes are another important approach to early detection of cancer. There are three cancer screening programmes in Northern Ireland. The breast and cervical screening programmes have been in place for 25 years. Over 80 cervical cancers and around 300 breast cancers are detected through screening each year. That early detection has resulted in better outcomes for those women. The five-year survival rate for screen-detected breast cancer, for example, is 95%.

The UK National Screening Committee, which advises the four health Departments on screening programmes, recommended that bowel cancer screening, using faecal occult blood testing, should be offered to all men and women aged 50 to 74. In April 2010, the bowel cancer screening programme was introduced in Northern Ireland. It invited men and women aged 60 to 69 to be screened. It was fully implemented across all health and social care trusts in January 2012. It is the first cancer screening programme to include men.

Research has shown that bowel cancer screening can reduce deaths by 15%. That means that around 60 lives could be saved here in Northern Ireland each year. All those who are eligible to participate in the programme are sent a screening test kit to their home address every two years. It is a simple test to detect tiny amounts of blood in the bowel motions, which can be an early warning sign of bowel cancer, before the person has any other signs or symptoms. If the test is positive, it does not mean that the person has bowel cancer, but that they need further investigation. They will be referred for a colonoscopy, which is an examination of the lining of the bowel from the inside.

For every 1,000 people screened, approximately 20 people will have a positive test for traces of blood in their bowel motion, but only two of those will subsequently be identified with bowel cancer.

In the year April 2012 to March 2013, 120,000 people were invited to participate in the programme. Since the programme started in April 2010, 270 cancers have been detected. I have met some of the people whose cancer was detected by the screening programme. They told me that their treatment was successful, and they testified that they owed their lives to the programme.

It is known that the incidence of bowel cancer increases with age. In Northern Ireland, eight out of 10 people who are diagnosed with bowel cancer are over 60. In April 2012, the Northern Ireland bowel cancer screening programme was extended to include all eligible men and women aged between 60 and 71. As detailed in the Programme for Government, I am pleased to confirm that, from April 2014, the programme will be further extended to include those aged up to 74. I will consider extending the age range for men and women down to 50 after this extension has been completed. Northern Ireland has adopted a phased approach to the introduction and extension of the bowel cancer screening programme, in line with the approach taken by the other UK countries.

The introduction of a new screening programme is a complex task that requires the establishment of the necessary and appropriate organisation and management, technology and services. There is a need to ensure that there is sufficient endoscopy capacity for bowel screening, that endoscopy services meet national standards, and that a training programme is in place to increase the number of endoscopists so that the necessary follow-up services can be provided to those who are identified as being at risk through the screening programme.

In considering extending the age range down to 50, I will be interested to see the outcome of a pilot study using flexible sigmoidoscopy, which is being taken forward by the Bowel Screening Advisory Committee in England. Flexible sigmoidoscopy is used to examine the inside of the lower bowel. This is a one-off test that will be offered to men and women at the age of 55. The pilot study will evaluate staffing models for future roll-out, along with the acceptability of the screening test to the public. It will also test the IT system that will support the programme.

Previous studies have concluded that flexible sigmoidoscopy is a safe and practical test and, when offered only once between the ages of 55 and 64, confers a substantial and long-lasting benefit. Research has shown that using it as a screening test for bowel cancer

can reduce mortality from the disease by 43% and reduce the incidence of bowel cancer by 33%. I will consider the implications for Northern Ireland when the evaluation of the pilot study is available.

One of the challenges faced by the bowel cancer screening programme is getting men and women to respond to their screening invitation and return their completed test kit. The target uptake for the screening programme is 55%, but we are falling slightly short of that figure. The uptake of screening for the year ending 31 March 2013 was 50%. That is an improvement on the previous year's figure of 47%. Hidden in the figures is the fact that men are less likely to take up their invitation to be screened, yet research has shown that bowel cancer is slightly more common in men than in women. The uptake rate for women is around 52%; for men, it is around 46%.

In the spring and winter of 2012, the Public Health Agency ran a public information campaign of TV and radio adverts. That had a very positive impact on uptake but it has not been sustained in the long term. A different approach to the campaign is being planned, focused on a lower intensity over a longer period.

As Members have pointed out, we have to recognise that bowel cancer rates are higher in deprived areas. People in deprived areas have higher levels of ill health across a range of issues, and many of those will include cancers. They are more reluctant to seek medical advice earlier. The PHA has an action plan to target hard-to-reach groups and increase the screening uptake. Work will be done to try to encourage people in deprived areas to come forward for bowel cancer screening, among other things.

The Public Health Agency is also looking at a number of alternative ways to improve uptake, including working closely with the voluntary and community sector to raise awareness of bowel cancer screening, especially among those who work with men.

We all have responsibility for our health. Therefore, I end with a plea to all those who have received a test kit: use it, because it could save your life.

5.00 pm

Mr Wells: We all congratulate Mr Spratt on his courage in coming forward and explaining the consequences of bowel cancer in his life and the very difficult journey that he has been through. I also congratulate Sean Rogers, who was also prepared to be so honest with the Assembly. I have seen an advert in connection with bowel cancer that says, "Don't die of embarrassment". There is absolutely no doubt that, when people such as Mr Spratt and Mr Rogers are prepared to come forward and tell the public what they have gone through, it will encourage others to face up to reality. One in four of us will get cancer, and it is absolutely vital that we take steps with our lifestyle and diagnosis to ensure that we do not end up as one of those statistics.

Mr Spratt said that bowel cancer was the second most common form of cancer in Northern Ireland, and it is definitely the second most common form of cancer in males. Early diagnosis is absolutely crucial, and every Member who spoke made that point. Mr Spratt also mentioned the issue of embarrassment. At the moment, screening is for 60- to 71-year-olds, but the uptake is low. The Minister was able to bring us more up-to-date statistics on the uptake of testing, but the figures quoted by

Mr Spratt that only 40% of men and women return their kit are worrying. That is an issue of great concern, given that some of those individuals may have bowel cancer and may not realise it.

Mr Spratt made a very useful point when he said that it was important that GPs take ownership of the screening campaign and make personal recommendations to their patients that they return the test. That was useful because, as the Minister said, there is a concern about uptake rates. Mr Spratt also said that 95% of those diagnosed with bowel cancer were over 50 and that we needed to target people from that age. It was encouraging to hear Mr Spratt pay tribute to the treatment that he received from our hospital service in Northern Ireland. We hear so much negative publicity about the performance of our health service that, every now and then, it is nice to hear from someone who has had a high level of treatment.

Maeve McLaughlin quoted the worrying statistic that, every year in Northern Ireland, 1,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer. Very sadly, 400 of those people die. She pointed out that there were great variations in diagnosis and survivorship in parts of the British Isles. That is an issue of concern. She made the worrying comment that there is a rise in the number of people under 50 who suffer from bowel cancer. That trend should certainly be addressed. She also said that younger people, in particular, were not aware of the symptoms. She made the useful comment that some people have to be diagnosed five times before they are referred to a specialist. Clearly, if people present with symptoms but are not referred for specialist treatment, the fault lies with the health service rather than the individual. It is clear that some of our GPs are not yet aware of the symptoms of bowel cancer.

Fearghal McKinney made an interesting comment about the great concern and angst that patients and their families feel. Of course, Sean Rogers and Mr Spratt graphically told us about the sheer intense feeling of, I suppose, horror when people hear that they have been diagnosed with any form of cancer. Mr McKinney agreed with other Members that everyone over 50 should be screened. He asked what the Minister was doing to roll out an expansion of the screening programme, and I hope that the Minister has answered that point. Mr McKinney paid tribute to the work of the Belfast cancer centre at the City Hospital, and he was absolutely right to do so. As an aside, I congratulate Paddy Johnston, the lead clinician in that facility, who has been made the vice chancellor of Queen's University. It is an indication of the work that he has performed for many years that he has been raised to that important position. Mr McKinney also emphasised the need for a holistic approach to the treatment of the condition.

Mr Beggs emphasised that symptoms develop late and that early diagnosis and detection can lead to a 90% success rate. It is a sad indictment that so many people out there would have lived but did not because it was not detected in time. This is one of those cancers that is almost totally avoidable, and Mr Beggs emphasised that there needed to be more testing. He made the novel point that the highest rate of bowel cancer was in those aged between 75 and 97 but there was no testing at all for those individuals. He asked why that was the case. He emphasised the fact that people, particularly females, have to wait so long to be seen by a specialist.

It is sad that Kieran McCarthy was the first person to mention lifestyle. We know that there are genetic issues with bowel cancer and that you have a much greater chance of having it if it runs in the family. Also, those who smoke, those who drink and those who are obese and take little exercise have a far higher prevalence of bowel cancer than the average population. That comes up time and time again, and there are so many diseases in Northern Ireland where the same factors are so common. Therefore, the whole Public Health Agency agenda of making us take responsibility for our own life and not making lifestyle choices that endanger our health has to be emphasised. Other Members raised that issue subsequently, but Kieran McCarthy was the first to do so. He also made an interesting point about the variations in survival between the Belfast Trust area and the rest of Northern Ireland, and that is a worry. One of the advantages of having a unified health and social care system in Northern Ireland is that there should not be a postcode lottery and everyone should have the same opportunities. Yet, the statistics that he quoted from Naomi Long seem to indicate that, if you live in Belfast, you have a far higher risk of developing and dying from bowel cancer than those in the rest of the community.

Gordon Dunne said that mortality rates had fallen since the 1970s, which is good news, but there needs to be more support for families and carers. He paid tribute, as I do, to the work of the charities in the field. This is not a glamorous charity field to be in; people do not queue up at the doors to talk about and support bowel cancer charities. However, as we have seen today, it is a very important issue.

Mickey Brady raised the importance of regular screening. He said that that would reduce the chances of mortality by 16%, and that is important. We wish his friend on the Isle of Lewis all the best with his treatment. I hope that he was detected early.

Pam Brown raised a very worrying statistic that others, including the Minister, quoted. She said that one in 20 people in Northern Ireland will be diagnosed with bowel cancer. That means that several people — at least one person — in the Chamber today, in addition to Mr Spratt, may be diagnosed with the condition, and 20 people in the Assembly as a whole. She wanted the time limits for diagnosis extended, and she stated that there is little in the way of symptoms for bowel cancer until it is too late and, therefore, screening and detection is absolutely crucial. She said that those who were caught early have a 90% chance of survival, but only 10% of those who had bowel cancer were detected early.

In a very personal and courageous contribution, Sean Rogers outlined his journey with cancer. I suppose that I am undoing myself by saying this because he is a political opponent, but we are glad to see that he is so fit and healthy. Being serious about it, it is good to see someone who has had an early diagnosis, has had treatment and has come back looking as healthy as he does. He quoted the worrying statistic of the levels of cancer in south Down.

Sam Gardiner had personal experience of tragedy and emphasised the fact that 23,000 people are diagnosed in the UK each year. He stated that, in Wales, screening was for people aged between 60 and 74, but that, in Northern Ireland, it was for those between 60 and 71. Of course, Scotland has an even wider programme of screening. He, along with others, raised the fact that there is a higher

level of bowel cancer in socially deprived areas. Again, we are back to the lifestyle choices of diet, obesity, exercise, smoking and alcohol. However, he encouraged us by telling us that, between 1998 and 2003, bowel cancer rates in Europe had decreased by 4%.

John McCallister emphasised the importance of early diagnosis and cooperation in the health service on this important issue. Alex Easton said that 90 deaths could be prevented in Northern Ireland every year if we had a more effective screening programme.

Edwin Poots, the Minister, added to the debate by telling us that 270 instances of bowel cancer were detected already in Northern Ireland as a result of the screening procedure. He said that many of those who had it detected said that they owed their life to the scheme. That is excellent. However, if only half the people came forward, I suspect that it was not detected in another 270, and they may well be in a serious condition. He indicated that there was a possibility of extending screening to those who are 50 years old and above, and we hope that that happens as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of early diagnosis of bowel cancer in saving lives; commends the success of the existing screening programme; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider extending the age range that can access screening to incorporate a larger proportion of the population.

Adjourned at 5.10 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 October 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Fraud Awareness

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement to the House on the critical issue of raising fraud awareness across the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland. Before I do that, I apologise for not being in my place yesterday to move a particular piece of legislation. An opportunity arose to meet the family of people who are in the public realm at this time on the abortion issue. The lady is carrying twins who have no prospect of life outside the womb. Unfortunately, I was a tad late. I apologise for that. That is the reason.

This is an important opportunity to highlight the detrimental impact that fraud has on the HSC and what can be done to combat it. Health and Social Care is the biggest spender of public resources in Northern Ireland. Those of us who provide the services have to be vigilant in the fight against fraud. Two weeks ago, I launched Fraud Awareness Month, the purpose of which is to raise awareness of the threat of fraud in the HSC. It provides a great opportunity to spotlight this serious problem and to stress the importance of counter fraud training and education. We have a duty to counter and report fraud and corruption wherever we work and by whomever it is perpetrated. Such activities are unprofessional, indefensible and, ultimately, reduce the money that is available for front line services.

Let me be clear: fraud is wrong. It is a criminal offence and will not be tolerated in the HSC. It is important to recognise that the vast majority of people are generally honest and would not consider acting fraudulently. However, that fact can, sometimes, make it difficult to accept that a colleague or fellow professional might act dishonestly. There is a general perception that HSC staff are employed in the caring professions and are, therefore, in some way above such behaviour. However, cases have come to light: clinical professionals of considerable standing who make claims for services not supplied; nursing staff who claim grants to which they are not entitled; senior managers who claim for journeys never travelled; support staff who undertake private work while on sick leave; and members of the public who try to evade payment for treatment. The list goes on.

The House will have heard in recent days about inappropriate access to free healthcare in Northern

Ireland. That is one of the key areas of fraudulent activity for the HSC, where those not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland fraudulently use a Northern Ireland address to secure access to free healthcare services in primary and secondary care settings. That activity represents a significant and inappropriate drain on health service resources.

Fraud is by no means a victimless crime. In the health and social care setting, fraud can lead to direct financial losses through overpayments; damage the reputation of an organisation through public exposure of its perceived weaknesses; and indirectly lead to a failure to provide sufficient care to vulnerable patients or clients because the money has been lost to the system. In each of those examples, the general public is the ultimate victim. No matter what, it is clear that any type of fraud is wrong, whether it be for £1 or £1 million. It robs the HSC of vital resources and means that there is less to be invested in front line services. That is particularly evident in light of the significant financial challenges currently faced by all public services. Put simply, every penny lost to fraud is a wasted opportunity. It means that someone somewhere is not getting the treatment that they are entitled to. We must therefore understand that we all pay the price for fraud. Every penny lost as a result of fraudulent behaviour results in a reduction in patient care.

Although the true extent of fraud in the HSC and, indeed, across the NHS nationally is not known, independent research across the health sector in a number of countries suggests that the potential level of fraud may be between 3% and 7%. Taking the highest figure, that equates to around a quarter of a billion pounds of my Department's budget. Even if the level of fraud was estimated at 1%, that equates to some £40 million of my Department's budget. That is £40 million that is not available for investing in front line services. What would that buy? It would buy, for example, 4,000 coronary heart bypass procedures or 55,000 cataract surgical procedures or 5,500 hip replacements or renal dialysis treatment for 1,000 patients.

My aim today is to raise the profile of the threat of fraud, and I would like to highlight what the HSC is doing about it. First, everyone has a part to play in stopping fraud. Everyone who accesses health and social care services or works to deliver those services has a role to play in tackling fraud. If we are to be successful in achieving that, we need to recognise that fraud is wrong, to acknowledge the damage that it causes and to report it effectively. It is therefore necessary to increase the levels of fraud awareness among everyone, not only HSC employees and those who work in healthcare but the general public. It is

everyone's duty to report fraud or suspected fraud through either the HSC fraud hotline or the HSC's online reporting tool or, indeed, through the relevant organisation's whistle-blowing procedures. Any information — no matter how small — can be of assistance in combating fraud.

Secondly, there is already a significant amount of counter-fraud work being undertaken by the HSC's counter-fraud unit. The unit employs a team of trained specialised staff who have responsibility for delivering a professional counter-fraud service across the HSC. The counter-fraud unit is currently investigating over 100 cases, covering all types of fraudulent activity. During the past year, there have been some notable successes. Two owners of a business contracted to carry out domiciliary eye services were given 18-month jail sentences suspended for two years, and £40,000 was recovered. Serious crime orders were awarded against the owners, which will prevent them from having any proprietary interest in any ophthalmic business for the next five years. An optometrist working for the business was struck off.

The Business Services Organisation's (BSO) probity services team provides assurance on the millions of pounds expended every year on family health services. That probity work is undertaken in collaboration with clinical advisers from the Health and Social Care Board. In the last financial year, over 400 probity checks and visits with family practitioners were performed, and just under £200,000 was recovered. We also ensured the removal of 108 people from GP registration lists. A robust investigation showed that those individuals were not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland and were, therefore, not entitled to register for free access to our health and social care services.

Our cross-border work is underpinned by a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Social Protection in the Republic of Ireland. That allows us to obtain information that will confirm whether a person who is claiming to be resident in Northern Ireland is also claiming to be resident in ROI. That greatly improves our investigation times. In addition, a new service — eligibility to access health services — was set up June 2013 to provide advice and guidance to HSC trusts on how to deal with inappropriate access to healthcare. We are, therefore, serious about tackling fraud and will endeavour to ensure that it is punished appropriately.

In closing, I emphasise three key messages to the House. First, fraud is wrong; it is unethical, immoral and unlawful. Secondly, we all pay the price, because front line services suffer, and there is less money to pay for the treatment of patients. Thirdly, everyone has a role to play. We all have a responsibility to be alert to fraud, and we can all minimise the risk of fraud by recognising the potential risk of fraud, knowing what constitutes fraud and knowing how and when to report fraud. As Minister, I am committed to developing a real anti-fraud culture across the HSC, where everyone regards fraud as unacceptable and everyone understands the role that they can play in eliminating it. I commend the statement to the House.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. Every one of us should pay attention to the requirement to ensure that we have an efficient and effective health service, and we cannot lose sight of the

statistics that the Minister outlined in his statement. Even if fraud was estimated at 1%, that would be in the region of £40 million of the overall health budget.

The media recently highlighted the figure of 80,000 people who had been registered for a medical card in the North, but, given that there are issues because residents in the Twenty-six Counties who work in the North have that entitlement, is that 80,000 an accurate figure? I suggest that the figure is a lot lower than that. Is there a specific issue with students' access to medical cards in the North? Finally, how much does the counter-fraud unit cost to run and what has been recovered over the past year?

Mr Poots: First, regarding the medical cards, the mid-year population estimate in Northern Ireland in 2011 was 1,814,300. The estimate for those registered with a general practitioner in 2011 was 1,893,000, and that is a 4.34% difference. In England, the population estimate was 53,107,200, and the figure for those registered with a GP was 55,308,000, a 4.14% difference. In Scotland, the difference is 4.34%, and, in Wales, the difference is 3.24%. So, the issue is not peculiar to Northern Ireland. It appears to happen across the United Kingdom, and, in that respect, we have to look at what the issues are.

The Member mentioned one of the issues, which is that students who come to study here can rightfully claim a medical card, but, very often, when they leave this country, they do not give up their medical card and, therefore, are not taken off the register. We also have people from Northern Ireland who have emigrated or gone to live elsewhere and whose name has not come off the medical cards. Very often, those people will have died elsewhere. There is a series of other reasons. Some patients are registered in more than one practice simultaneously. Systems and processes are in place to capture those cases, but that still happens. So, it is an issue of concern, but there are reasons for the disparity, and it is not particularly different from what happens in other places. Nonetheless, if we believe that information is there that can lead to helping us to clamp down on fraud, it is certainly something that we would be interested in tackling.

10.45 am

I mentioned the case of the ophthalmic service, which is one of the cases that has been looked at over the past number of years. We also have examples of persons who have fraudulently obtained prescription medication, and there have been convictions, including a jail sentence, for some 50 separate offences. An arrest was made on 15 March 2013 in which there are potentially 80 separate counts. There has been recovery of £25,000 in the case of one nurse who was falsifying time sheets. There has been involvement in civil recovery legal processes for pharmaceutical manufacturers over the past number of years, and that has netted recoveries in excess of £2 million. So, work is going on to secure the recovery of moneys.

I understand that the fraud investigation team employs around five people. Those people are very busy, and, as we look to the future, we may consider enhancing and strengthening that further, given what we are finding with fraud.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome this initiative against fraud. What is being done to

tackle people from the Irish Republic falsely claiming to be resident in Northern Ireland so that they can use the health and social service provision?

Mr Poots: There is a long-standing issue for the health service in Northern Ireland on that, and the extent of the abuse is unquantified at this point. However, on the basis of evidence from known cases, it is a very significant issue. We recently signed a memorandum of understanding between CFPS and the Department of Social Protection. That has been formalised and was signed off on in July this year. It will allow CFPS to obtain information that will confirm that a person who claims to be resident in Northern Ireland is also claiming to be resident in the Republic of Ireland. That is cross-border cooperation that I am happy to endorse and that will significantly reduce the timescale of our CFPS investigations.

Since August 2012, CFPS has investigated some 108 ROI residents who were found to have falsely claimed to be resident in Northern Ireland. All those people have been removed from the NIGP registration system. Those cases were highlighted either by whistle-blowing reports or related CFPS proactive work, and their discovery has prevented a significant future drain on Northern Ireland health service resources.

Mr McKinney: I agree that fraud is wrong, and the SDLP supports that stance fully and endorses fraud awareness. Does the Minister accept that, while we are dealing with potential dishonesty, it is also important to be honest with the public? The goalposts of fraud that he has set here extend to £250 million on one hand and to £40 million on the other. There is an inference with the bigger figure that potentially more NHS staff will be implicated and fewer staff will be implicated with the smaller figure. Does he agree that there is a need for accuracy in that regard?

Mr Poots: It is hard to be definitive with accuracy. I think that I said that the figure was estimated to be between 3% and 7%, which would be £120 million to £250 million. Nonetheless, I accept that the gap between the two is massive. I am not sure whether we will ever get to complete and total accuracy on this. However, when I look at the situation and the circumstances, I expect the low-hanging fruit to be the first that the counter-fraud investigations will go after. Nonetheless, a considerable number of others will have to be addressed and looked at, and, as I indicated, whether it is £1 or £1 million, it is wrong and deserves investigation.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he advise what is being done to improve the collection of information in real time? Our GPs have a sophisticated computer system to track individual patients' healthcare and to enable quality and outcomes framework (QOF) performance payments to be made to them. The Minister talked about two-bedroom houses with 12 or 16 adults living in them: can he advise why the computer system cannot be used to identify such situations in real time, rather than having to wait for some form of historical data mining?

Mr Poots: I did not refer to two-bedroom houses with 12 or 16 people living in them. I am not saying that that is not the case, but I do just not know. It may well be the case, and it may be accurate in some instances, given how some things are done.

GPs are independent contractors who own the IT systems. However, the electronic care record may give us the opportunity to address the issue better. As for bringing the information together, I expect that we will have the full cooperation of GPs with the counter-fraud service to ensure that we can better identify people who should not be on the GP register and have them removed from the list. Many of them do not pose a particular problem to us because, although they remain registered, they are not living in the country and are not using the services. However, it does not seem unreasonable to seek to reduce the disparity of 80,000 that exists, albeit that it is a disparity that is replicated across the UK. It is not novel to Northern Ireland.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister mentioned whistle-blowing procedures in his statement. We all agree that that would probably be the best way of tackling fraud, but it is unfortunate that the Department's record on whistle-blowers is not very good. I think about the lady from the Fire and Rescue Service who lost her job. Has the Department done anything to assure whistle-blowers that their efforts will be welcomed and listened to and that they will certainly not lose their job?

Mr Poots: As far as I understand, in the case that the Member refers to, the person still works for Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and has not lost her job. Nonetheless, I wrote to everybody in the health service and the Fire and Rescue Service setting out what whistle-blowing is about and indicating that we are offering them protection for whistle-blowing. We are not just encouraging them to do it but are indicating that it is their duty to report wrongdoing when they see it. I want to instil a culture in the organisation that whistle-blowing is the right and proper thing to do.

I am encouraged by the number of people coming forward indicating that they are well aware of significant problems to do with a range of issues and encouraged that they want to see those problems addressed. It is wrong that people who know of wrongdoing live in fear of reporting it. That is a further punishment on those individuals. Individuals who know of wrongdoing should report it and should not have any fear of doing so. That goes way beyond the health service, but it is something that I want to instil in it.

Mr D McIlveen: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Will he give us examples of cases that he is aware of that might currently be with the PSNI?

Mr Poots: We need to be somewhat cautious about ongoing cases, but a police investigation is under way into four vulnerable adults who, it is suspected, have been the victims of significant financial abuse dating back to the early 2000s. We also have a bank nurse who submitted time sheets between July and August 2010, all of which were fraudulent. A PSNI investigation is under way after concerns were raised about the transportation policy operated by a care facility, and a PSNI investigation is under way into the issue of direct payments between April 2007 and July 2013 to the value of £72,500. In all those things, an investigation is exactly that: an investigation. It is not an indication of wrongdoing. It is an indication of wrongdoing only if an investigation is put to the PPS to indicate that a prosecution should take place and a conviction then happens in a court of law. The PSNI is carrying out a number of investigations in conjunction with our fraud investigators.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Is ceist thábhachtach í seo, nó níl sé inghlactha ar bhealach ar bith go mbeadh an oiread sin airgid ag gabháil amú agus a chailliúint ag an chóras sláinte nuair atá gear-ghá leis.

I agree with the Minister: it is totally unacceptable that this amount of money or anything approaching it should be lost to our health system when there is such a need for it currently and always. The Minister said that it is necessary to increase the levels of fraud awareness for everyone. How does he intend to get the anti-fraud message across to everyone, from the offices of the top administrators to the service users and everyone in between?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. Over the course of this month, opportunities have arisen to highlight the issue in a very public way. We launched it two weeks ago. On that day, I think, I did six or seven interviews for the media, so there was widespread coverage. Obviously, we are doing our business today in the House, which may produce more coverage. People are very well aware of what is going on. People in the system are aware that more is being done to counter fraud. Highlighting it will help to reduce fraud because people will become more aware that there is that scrutiny taking place. Fraud awareness month will greatly assist us in delivering on that.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he recognised that there is inappropriate access to free healthcare in Northern Ireland, where those not ordinarily resident here fraudulently use a Northern Ireland address to secure access to free healthcare services. Whereas healthcare is free in Northern Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland, I believe, it costs €50 to €75 to visit a GP and €100 to visit a hospital. Will the Minister therefore ensure that each Northern Ireland hospital regularly publishes the income it receives from treating patients from the Republic of Ireland so that that is kept in the public domain?

Mr Poots: It is for the hospital to pass that information to the Health Department, which is responsible at national level for recouping the money. It is not for the hospital to recoup the money. This is a difficult issue. Take Altnagelvin Area Hospital or Daisy Hill Hospital, which are right on the border. On Saturday nights, people arrive into the emergency departments a little the worse for wear having been out in some of the facilities in the cities. Clearly, many of those people will come from the Republic of Ireland because of the proximity of the cities to the border, and they will require treatment. They are not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland, but we should be able to claim the money back from the Republic of Ireland. It is the hospital's responsibility to ensure that that information is passed on to allow that to be the case.

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

The memorandum of understanding that we signed with the Republic in July will be helpful in many senses. Recent European legislation that has been approved will assist us in ensuring that we can claim back moneys not just from the Republic of Ireland but from other places whose people have used the Northern Ireland healthcare system. It is free of charge, but other people have to pay for similar services.

11.00 am

Mrs D Kelly: I also welcome the Minister's statement. It was particularly helpful that he set the context that the money lost could have purchased services and surgery for some of our citizens. Picking up on Mr McCarthy's point, it is my understanding, Minister, that the lady in question in the Fire Service was not given her old job back, and, therefore, a very strong message needs to go out that people who step forward as whistle-blowers will be protected and not treated as though they were the wrongdoer. Does the Minister agree that much more needs to be done to protect people who step forward as whistle-blowers?

Mr Poots: I am not sure of the appropriateness of talking about individual cases in a public forum such as this. I outlined very clearly to Mr McCarthy the steps that we have taken to encourage people to whistle-blow and the assurances that they have been given that they will be protected when they do so. I have given the assurance that, if they do not get satisfaction from their line managers, they can move further up the management chain. If people feel strongly enough about something, and it is a significant enough issue, they should go right to the top of the organisation. I have recommended that people take that course and I encourage them to do so.

Mr Allister: I do not doubt for one minute that fraud may be as extensive as the Minister says. Therefore, does the Minister think that the five members of staff in the anti-fraud unit will ever tackle that? If it is only five people, can it ever be proactive? Will it not always just be reactive to situations when it will probably take a proactive initiative to deal with fraud? What plans has he to increase the scale of fraud investigation in the Department?

Mr Poots: I tend to agree with the Member, and that issue is being looked at. Although the number of staff in the unit is small, those people are, nonetheless, effective. It currently has a caseload of 100 cases under investigation. We are looking at how it could be enhanced but, as with all of these things, it involves investment in difficult times, and enhancing the fraud service would involve taking money from some other service. However, the fraud service may well reap much more income from the work that it carries out than it costs, so it could be an investment that reaps a dividend and allows us to invest further in the health service. People are looking at and addressing that issue.

Mr Wells: The Minister outlined the work that he is carrying out in conjunction with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland, but I am sure that he will accept that this important task can be carried out only with the cooperation of a wide range of statutory organisations in Northern Ireland. Can he outline the other players in this important task?

Mr Poots: Obviously, in Northern Ireland, the PSNI is a key player, as are general practitioners. The Departments in the Republic of Ireland are key players. We will have to work very closely with all those organisations to bring issues forward and provide qualitative information to the Public Prosecution Service so that it can establish a case when taking people to court. Of course, the main players are the people in the organisations, because they have the most information and the qualitative information. That can be passed to us, allowing us to look at these cases, challenge the individuals who are involved, take actions

to recover lost finances, and prosecute when appropriate. The most important players are the 70,000 individuals who work in the HSC and Fire Service sector.

Private Members' Business

Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. 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 wish to speak will have five minutes.

Before we begin, the House should note that, if amendment No 1 is made, amendment No 2 cannot also be made, as the wording will have changed to such an extent that it would not be in order to put the Question on it.

Ms McCorley: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the findings contained in the Criminal Justice Inspection's reports on Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre; notes that the Owers review highlighted most of the issues raised in these reports; and calls on the Minister of Justice to take the necessary steps to ensure that the prison reform programme is progressed in the manner envisaged by the prison review team's report.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We are having this debate today as a result of a number of very worrying reports that have come from inspections of the Prison Service. Those have been a matter of grave concern. The background of the motion is as follows. Seo cúla rún an lae inniu. In 2010, a prison review was set up to examine, among other things, the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons, and also:

"Consideration of a women's prison, which is fit for purpose and meets international obligations and best practice".

Chaired by Anne Owers, the review group took evidence and carried out its investigation over a period of months, which resulted in two reports making a large number of specific recommendations. It was decided that an interim report would be issued early in the process to focus on the problems of the system in general and to set out the necessary components of a solution. Those internal changes were required to be put in place before any further adjustments to the system could happen — a change programme that would involve people letting go of processes and attitudes that had become familiar and comfortable. Also required were better communication skills, stronger and more visible leadership and support, and professional development for those undergoing and implementing the required changes.

The final report from the review group made very depressing reading. In the eight months between the two reports, the reality was that very little had changed, despite the launch of the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme, a new sense of purpose at the top of the service and support from the Justice Minister. The endemic and systemic problems identified in the interim report remained unresolved. Efforts to move forward to

create a more effective and efficient prison environment were poor and were not helped by a lack of cooperation from the Prison Officers' Association (POA). The report also cited problems related to excessive staffing levels, high levels of sick leave, restrictions on the use of support staff and inefficient shift schemes that wasted resources and made it impossible to provide sufficiently active and consistent regimes.

While the lack of progress was disappointing, there was, however, a view that change could still happen, but the ensuing six months would be crucial in that regard. In February this year, an announced inspection of Hydebank Wood by the Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) took place into the treatment of women and young male offenders. The report emanating from that inspection has led to the debate that we are having today. Tháinig díospóireacht an lae inniu amach as an tuairisc a d'éirigh as an scrúdú sin. Just like the previously mentioned reports, the results of that inspection were a matter of very grave concern. I will go into the specifics of the report that relate to the treatment of women, and my colleague Sean Lynch will detail the effects on young adults in the system.

Before I go any further, it is important to recognise that women prisoners in the system must be considered and treated completely separately and differently from the way in which male prisoners are catered for. The 2010 review of the Prison Service referred to the fact that women and young adults are poorly served by the prison system, which was created primarily to serve the needs of adult men. Hydebank Wood is a poor home for both groups.

Women prisoners form a small proportion of our prison population, although they have very specific needs and vulnerabilities. Many are vulnerable to mental health problems, substance misuse and various other forms of abuse and social problems prior to imprisonment. Many women prisoners have dependant children and are often sole carers. Many problems emanate as a result of that for the children and the women. Women are much less likely to reoffend compared to men; only 20% are reconvicted.

In 2006, the Corston report identified problems in women's lives that often trigger a crisis point, which in turn leads to offending behaviour. Those crisis points include domestic circumstances and problems, such as domestic violence and childcare issues; personal circumstances, such as mental illness and substance misuse; and socio-economic factors, including poverty, isolation, unemployment and homelessness. Baroness Corston concluded that a more women-centred, integrated approach would help in ensuring that women are properly supported to lead law-abiding lives and would reduce levels of reoffending.

In another report on women offenders in England and Wales, it was specified that there is a need for a distinct, radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, women-centred, integrated approach to how women are treated in the criminal justice system. In that instance, that led to the adoption of community alternatives to custody and the resourcing of projects offering holistic support that is tailored to the specific needs of women, rather than placing a focus on them as people posing a risk of reoffending.

Clearly, there is a strong case for treating women differently from men when it comes to criminal justice. It is also clear that prison is not always the solution.

There are now convincing arguments for looking at community-based models as more suitable choices. The Inspire model, which was recently taken up in Belfast, has, through effective partnership working, produced very positive outcomes for the women concerned. It has proven effective in decreasing the risk of offending and in preventing reoffending.

The Inspire model offers essential, through-the-gate support for women prisoners, which is a very meaningful way of dealing with the problems that those women face and helping them to move on from the prison system. Inspire operates outside the mainstream with separate funding. It is innovative, flexible and dynamic. It is a model that should be built upon. Rather than a focus on prison, the Inspire model should be the default setting for dealing with women who offend or who are at risk of offending.

It is accepted that there will probably always be a requirement for women to be imprisoned in some particular cases. In that regard, it is strongly argued that Ash House is wholly unsuitable for women prisoners because of its design and their collocation with male adults. It is vital that the needs of women are properly addressed in their own purpose-built accommodation.

Unfortunately, the report from the Criminal Justice Inspection was disappointingly negative in what it had to detail. It reflected very poorly on how the prison and other relevant statutory agencies treat women prisoners. The inspection found that, despite the recommendations in the Owers report, women continued to be housed in a predominantly male prison, which was having a significant and intractable impact upon the outcomes that they experienced. Women were marginalised and restricted in their access to facilities and services. They were subjected to verbal intimidation and abuse from male prisoners when travelling to courts and using exercise yards.

The findings included many other examples of failures to implement the recommendations of the prison review, which included that some prisoners experience victimisation from staff; they were needlessly strip searched; excessive random searches took place after visits; and lessons were not learned from deaths in custody. Phil Scraton's book, 'The Hurt Inside', details very difficult testimony on those deaths in custody. There was inadequate care for the most vulnerable women and the environment that they were forced to live in was claustrophobic and restrictive for long-term prisoners. There were inadequate improvements to healthcare and insufficient support for self-harmers. Provision for training and educational facilities was poor and did not really fit the challenging needs of those women. There was inadequate support for poor numeracy and literacy skills. It was clear that the needs of prisoners were not being well enough met and not well enough understood by the system. Little was done to equip women with the meaningful skills for leaving prison and resettling on the outside.

11.15 am

Those are damning indictments on the Prison Service and are a source of shame in respect of how women have been treated. The most fundamental injustice to women prisoners is that they are held in Hydebank Wood, and they remain in a prison that is unsuited to their needs. It is wrong and disrespectful. A new purpose-built prison for women, which caters for them specifically and contributes

to the requirements of safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement, is an immediate priority. It is important that we adhere to the Owers report, which states that the prison for women must be fit for purpose.

What is also required immediately is the full implementation of the prison reform programme to ensure that all prisoners are treated with respect, that their physical and mental health needs are catered for and that they are supported in all the ways required, but particularly in terms of assisting them in their resettlement beyond prison.

The reports that we have seen on the Prison Service are a damning indictment on that service. Failure to act on the recommendations is totally unacceptable and should not be allowed to continue. There can be no further delay in the full implementation of all the recommendations specified in the prison reform programme, and we now call on the Justice Minister to ensure that that happens. Glaoim ar an Aire anois le cinntiú go dtarlaíonn sin. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Givan: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "Minister of Justice" and insert:

"to review the implementation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme to ensure support from all relevant stakeholders taking forward the reform programme."

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. It is right that we have it, given the nature of what was in the CJI report, which I do not think that anybody is in a position to defend. So, it is right that the motion is brought to the House today, and I am pleased to be able to speak on it.

The amendment goes beyond the Owers report. It has been termed for the wider SEE programme, which is to do with the strategic efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation, and concerns about how that is being implemented. The Minister of Justice needs to make an intervention in respect of how that is proceeding for a number of reasons that I will elaborate on. We cannot support the motion as outlined. There are a number of recommendations in the Owers report that the Democratic Unionist Party has some difficulty with, and that is why we cannot sign up to the motion as written.

Recommendation 3, for example, included a statutory presumption to ensure that effective community sentences are the preferred method of dealing with those who otherwise get short custodial sentences. The Minister lectures others when we want to put in mandatory sentencing that we should not interfere in judicial independence. Here, you have a recommendation taking the opposite approach that you should not send people to prison. So, to be consistent, we have indicated that the Minister should not take forward that recommendation, despite his efforts to continually seek to bring it forward. We cannot support that recommendation in the Owers report, even though a number of people will share the sentiment, but the question is this: why do some people who assault the police only get less than three months in prison when they should get longer sentences? That deals with why we had to table this amendment around the Owers report.

In respect of the SEE programme —

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Poots: Does the Member agree that Fire Service personnel, Ambulance Service personnel and hospital personnel need to receive greater protection and assurance and that more custodial sentences for individuals who attack such staff in front line services would send out a very positive message to dissuade people from engaging in such activity?

Mr Givan: I do. We often say that we should take a zero-tolerance approach to these issues. I am concerned that this recommendation would send out the wrong message. That is why we have had to amend the motion slightly.

The Minister launched the SEE programme in a hail of publicity at the time, and he said a number of things about how he was going to take forward the reform programme. He said:

"I recognise that the challenge falls not only to the management and staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, but also to me, as Minister of Justice, to my colleagues in the Executive; to members of the Justice Committee; to the staff associations; and to partners across society as a whole."

In that respect, the Minister clearly indicates that he has a particular role in how the SEE programme is taken forward. Therefore, when the problems are presented to him, it is incumbent on him to act and to respond to that. My party and I are concerned about a number of things that have been happening, including the breakdown in the relationship between the management and the staff associations that the Minister refers to as being important to taking forward a change programme.

I spoke with the chairman of the Prison Officers' Association this morning. I will not repeat some of the language used. Needless to say, it was pretty evident to me that the relationship between staff associations and prison management is non-existent. There is a complete failure to engage, and that relationship is not there. When you are trying to take forward a fundamental change programme, which was envisaged in the Owers report — many of the recommendations of which we support — and outlined in the SEE programme, and the relationship between the main organisations and individuals who need to implement it has broken down, intervention from the Minister is required.

There has been much discussion about the TO model. Profilers were brought here from England to do that work. The chairman of the POA indicates that what is being sought here is an English solution to an Irish problem. I do not agree with the specific language of that sentiment, but I understand what he is trying to say about the way in which this process is being taken forward.

It concerns me that, at a time of fundamental change, Prison Service management, at senior level and director level, has been subject to so many changes that there is no consistency of approach. Colin McConnell, the director who started this programme, left Northern Ireland within a very short period. We now have another change in personnel at director level. That concerns me particularly, because a relationship had been struck up between the director of human resources, Ronnie Armour, and the chairman of the POA. Good work was being taken forward, but he is no longer in position.

You are trying to take forward this reform programme, but there has been a turnover of senior personnel at director level who are tasked to deal with it. There have been changes, and relationships that were struck up over a long period and were difficult to build have been broken off; that causes me concern.

The director at the time, at the same event, indicated its huge nature:

"The SEE Programme is a four year change management programme the scale of which is not dissimilar to the changes proposed by the Patten reforms. It will deliver fundamental end to end reform of the Prison Service by 2015."

Yet, personnel changes at senior management level have provided an inconsistent approach to the handling of the process. Relationships that had been established have not been maintained. That is why the Minister needs to make a direct intervention in the implementation of this programme.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you for giving way. What you are saying about industrial relations and so forth is very interesting. However, your remarks are not strictly applicable to the two reports on Hydebank Wood before us. In my respectful view, the issues arising out of those reports are different. I ask the Member to reflect on that. His comments may be more applicable to the wider prison estate than to Hydebank Wood.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for that intervention. It is not dissimilar in that a governor in Hydebank — I will not go into the particular circumstances — had to step away from that position. So, we have had inconsistent management of Hydebank as well. The change of personnel has implications for how the Hydebank Wood site is being operated.

You absolutely cannot restrict competitions or people from elsewhere applying for jobs, and I would not do that. However, there is a growing concern that people from Northern Ireland, who have been in the service and built up reputations and relationships, are not getting senior level jobs and that people from outside Northern Ireland are. They then need to build up relationships to overcome some of those barriers. It is obvious to me, when I speak to rank-and-file officers about the change, that they are being told what must happen and that they feel that it is being put upon them. They do not necessarily have a relationship with those who are telling them how to do their job. So, that is why I believe the Minister needs to review the implementation of the SEE programme and to take direct involvement in trying to repair the relationships that, I am told, are now non-existent between staff associations and the Prison Service management. I trust that the Assembly will support the amendment and try, collectively, to reform the service. I think that everybody in the House wants to be able to do that.

Mr Elliott: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Insert after "steps to ensure that":

"the performance of the senior administration of the Northern Ireland Prison Service is sufficient and that".

I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue. My party's amendment is based on some of the issues that Mr Givan just talked about in relation to the recognition and acknowledgement of Prison Service staff. All the blame

cannot be apportioned to them. Some feel that they are getting the wrong end of the stick in this and that they are getting a lot of unjustified criticism. Indeed —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way, just on that point?

Mr Elliott: OK. Yes.

Mr A Maginness: I know that these reports are critical of staff in some instances, but they also compliment them on their good work and on the good relationships that are in the Hydebank Wood complex.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Maginness for that point, which is exactly right. Comments in the reports record that some of the staff in the prisons have gone, in my words, well beyond the call of duty. That was reflected in Committee meetings when some of the senior management were there. Going back to some of the reports of deaths in custody, it was said that staff had been very attentive to some of those prisoners, particularly vulnerable prisoners. You are quite right, Mr Maginness, and I totally accept that. However, there is still a feeling from staff that almost all the blame comes in their direction and very little goes towards the senior management.

That is the basis of our proposal and amendment. We hope that the House will at least recognise that this is an issue and that it deserves to be recognised as such.

Going back to 2006, the Prison Officers' Association brought forward its own report on the restructuring of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. At the time, that report was quite helpful. Although he criticised others beyond the prison officers and was critical of the management, a spokesman said:

"Whilst I have been critical of management I would be less than honest with you and myself if I did not acknowledge that, at times, the POA has not been entirely blameless for some of the awkward situations which we have found ourselves in."

In that case, the prison officers accepted that there was work to be done by both management and themselves. However, that work does not appear to have progressed enough. I am told that there has been almost a breakdown of communications and relationships between the management, the Department and the Prison Officers' Association.

That is not helpful for either good relations or a working relationship. It is not helpful, either, for the prisoners whom prison officers have to accommodate and assist. That is what they are there to do. We must remember that prisoners are put in prison for punishment, but there is a rehabilitation process that is vital in the Prison Service. If there is no proper communication or support mechanism from the management through the staff to the prisoners, there will obviously be difficulties. I think that that is clearly recognised.

The reports raise a huge number of questions. I am always sceptical about how in-depth reports are, and I am anxious to hear from the Minister about some of the elements that have been reported. Obviously, when you hear about

issues such as bullying and violence reduction, it has been said that:

"An effective strategy should be developed to challenge bullying and antisocial behaviour".

So it goes on. I would be very surprised if some of that is not already taking place. If it is not, why is it not? If it is taking place, why has it been flagged up to an extent but not so that there has been recognition that it has been happening?

Obviously, we have heard very similar issues being brought out on several occasions, particularly drug misuse, bullying and very vulnerable prisoners. We heard about that in, for example, the Prisoner Ombudsman's reports on deaths in custody.

Some of those issues raise the question of whether some of those prisoners should even be in prison, especially those with mental health issues?

There are huge questions around the judiciary. This cannot be left to the Prison Service alone. There is a much wider aspect to be considered about who is put in prison, why they are put in prison and the rehabilitation process that takes place when they are in prison.

11.30 am

Another aspect that does not get as much mention is the —

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. On the point about the interaction between our judiciary and what is delivered on the ground in the Prison Service, I was somewhat surprised to learn during a recent Justice Committee meeting that a visit to a prison to see the prison regime was not part of a judge's training. That is an important element that needs to be borne in mind when bringing about many of the changes that we are trying to achieve here.

Mr A Maginness: Judges should be sent to prison.

Mr Dickson: Judges should be sent to prison. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Elliott: Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not necessarily hold to Mr Dickson and Mr Maginness's comments that judges should be sent to prison. On a more serious note, yes, there are better training mechanisms. That is relevant not only for the judiciary but for the Department and management. It would be of benefit to them to spend time there and to see what is required.

I was about to talk about the exit scheme. A number of prison officers and staff have retired in recent years, and I suppose that the number who have done so has been quite significant. As is the case in any role or job, once you lose significant experience, there is a major gap to fill. I know that a number of young recruits and new recruits have been brought into the service. That is very, very welcome. It is good to see that there is that interest and that those people are willing to serve society. That is what it is: a service to society. I was concerned at a Committee meeting some time ago, at which there was almost a suggestion that long-serving officers might be a bad influence on newly recruited officers. That worried me because there was almost an indication that some of the long-serving officers were not professional in their work. I refute that strongly. I believe that the implication was unwarranted. Although there is a requirement

and necessity to ensure that new recruits get the best opportunity that they can to deliver on what they have been trained to do, we need to recognise the service and experience of long-serving officers.

I also wish to comment on the locking-up of prisoners. It is vital that prisoners be kept active so that they do not merely sit about in their cell all day and all night with nothing to do. One of the allegations from prison officers and staff is that they have been trying to work with management to ensure that there is much less of that but that it does not seem to be happening. There are questions to be answered on why it is not happening, and not happening on the basis on which all of us — staff, management, prisoners and we as legislators — feel that it should.

However, we must get back to the initial point, which is that prisoners are in prison for punishment but that rehabilitation is vital when they are there. Finally, I make the point once again that we need a serious view to be taken on who is sent to prison and on whether some prisoners should be there in the first place.

Mr A Maginness: I feel a bit lonely because I do not have an amendment to propose. Nonetheless, I will try to make a few pertinent points in the meagre five minutes that I have been given. First, if we extend what Mr Finlay Spratt said about this being an English solution to an Irish problem, perhaps we should be looking for an Irish solution to an Irish problem, which might fix it.

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I will, surely.

Mr Elliott: Does the Member accept that a better terminology would be that we should have a Northern Ireland solution to a Northern Ireland problem?

Mr A Maginness: Or, even better, an Ulster solution to an Ulster problem. Whatever way you package it, Finlay Spratt was saying that we must have a bespoke solution to our problem.

It seems that the same issues arise time after time. The reports from the Criminal Justice Inspection date back to 2005 and repeat the same messages. We need to take that into consideration, particularly in relation to the women's prison at Ash House. I am sure that most colleagues have visited that facility and have found it to be claustrophobic and not physically fit for purpose.

In the foreword to his report, the chief inspector said:

"Overall this was a disappointing inspection, in particular because women continued to be held in a predominantly male prison, which was having a significant and intractable impact upon outcomes they experienced. Women were reasonably well cared for but they were inevitably marginalised and restricted in their access to facilities and services. There was also evidence of verbal intimidation from male prisoners from time to time."

I want to emphasise what the chief inspector goes on to say:

"Only the long-promised closure and replacement of Ash House would resolve the problems we saw."

That puts the whole thing in a nutshell.

I do not know what the Department's plans are. I know that it is committed to a new women's facility, but we really have to have a particular programme for that, with target dates, and so on. We cannot go on like this because we are simply repeating and recycling the same old problems. Therefore, we must find a more radical solution.

I do not like that building. It has to be changed because it is inappropriate for women to be held in a male prison. We have to move on it. It may be that we will have to approach this by having a design, build and management scheme in order to push it forward, if the Department or the Executive do not have the money; I do not know. However, we must have a radical solution. I say to the Minister of Justice that we cannot just continue like this.

Similar problems are re-emerging at the young offenders' centre, where the purposeful activity that Mr Elliott talked about is certainly absent. Lockdowns are also a serious problem there, because purposeful activity or the use of education and training facilities cannot be properly implemented unless there is a properly regulated day in the prison. There should be no lockdowns. If there were no lockdowns, a lot of this work could be done and progress could be made. That is a particular problem that must be addressed by prison management and the Prison Officers' Association to see whether there is some way around the difficulties in industrial relations.

I heard what Mr Givan said. He has particular knowledge of the circumstances and the conditions in which prison officers work. He brings a wealth of knowledge to the Committee for Justice and this House on those matters. However, there must be some way of repairing those difficult industrial relations, so that we can have facilities in the young offenders' centre and the women's prison that we can be proud of. The women's prison is different as far as the building is concerned, and so forth. However, the young offenders are young men whom we really need to help, retrain, re-educate and set out on the road to a decent life in which they will not reoffend.

In conclusion —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr A Maginness: — I support the motion and commend Ms McCorley —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will bring his remarks to a close, please.

Mr A Maginness: — for bringing it to the House. I think that there is a good deal of consensus around the House in relation to the reports.

Mr Dickson: Echoing the words of Mr Maginness, there is a great deal of consensus around the House. In fact, the motion should not divide the House. We do not have a situation in the Assembly today in which we are demanding that a Minister delivers something that he does not want to deliver. Indeed, our Minister has set this agenda himself by commissioning the Owers review and by committing an enormous amount of financial resource and political energy to the reform agenda. Time and again, he has appealed to all the parties to support him in that work, and this debate offers the House and Members an opportunity to do so.

Of course, we need to be concerned about the Criminal Justice Inspection reports. However, we also need to take

encouragement from the amount of long-term change that is happening across the system. For example, the report on Ash House raised concerns about the content of sentence plans, an issue that needs to be addressed and, in fact, is being addressed. We must not forget that the reform agenda that has been put in place by the Minister has delivered sentence plans for all offenders. Now that those plans are in place for everyone, it is quite right that we look at further improvements that can be made. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that we have come from a situation in which there were no plans for offenders at all.

It is clear that we also need to continue to develop innovative approaches to deal with women prisoners, whose needs are very different from those of their male counterparts. As Baroness Corston argued in her report, women are at a greater risk of suicide and mental health problems in prison. Those are key areas that require support. Many have been victims of violence and abuse prior to coming into prison, and we need to continue to support those issues while women are in prison. Indeed, as others have said, we need to look at the broader spectrum of who should be in the prison population. That highlights the importance of resolving the concerns that have been raised about Ash House, particularly regarding the specific needs of women in suicide and self-harm policy; the location of a women's unit in a largely male young offenders' centre; available activities and learning opportunities; and plans to reduce the risk of offending. Some of those concerns were also raised in the inspection report on Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre, which demonstrates that those issues are not confined to one facility. However, the Minister has, time and again, stated his desire and willingness to address those issues. He has demonstrated that by putting in place the massive reform agenda that is under way.

It is good that the motion recognises that most of the issues that have been highlighted are being addressed by the reform programme; a programme that is in progress. Reform on this scale does not just happen in an instant, or overnight. It is a process that takes time and, dare I say it, resources. It requires and may require legislative change, new strategies and schemes, and massive changes to the management. As has been referred to, employee relations are also a key part of the change management programme, as are the provision of healthcare, the development of an offender manager and, in particular, changes to learning and skills provision. If we are genuinely determined to improve and to deliver for the prison population, we need to deliver learning and skills provisions so that, when they come back into society, they are ready to make a contribution.

Those changes will not be completed overnight. There is a planned end point of April 2015, and the House has a responsibility to give its full support to the Department, the relevant agencies and the reform agenda. It is not for the House or its Members to micromanage our Prison Service.

11.45 am

We will support the motion. However, we will listen to the Members who argue for the amendments before we come to a final conclusion on the amendments presented to the House.

Mr Humphrey: I begin by paying tribute to the Prison Service in Northern Ireland for the leadership that it has given to this society over past decades. As my party colleague and the Chair of the Committee pointed out, we, on these Benches, have concerns with the Owers report, and I want to spend some time dealing with the Criminal Justice Inspection report. The report provides little comfort for the Minister or for the House when it talks about the ability of Hydebank and Ash House to deliver positive outcomes — whatever that means — for the prison estate. The report comes on the back of a number of serious reports over a number of years. Nine years ago, the women were moved from Maghaberry because of its unsuitability, and the report provides little comfort for the Minister and no reassurance, I believe, for the people of Northern Ireland.

As Mr Maginness mentioned, the regular use of lockdowns is of real concern. There seems to be an endemic problem or, if you listen to other reports, a systematic problem of drugs across the prison estate. It is all too easy to blame prison officers. Clearly, however, there is a huge responsibility on those responsible for the penal system in Northern Ireland to look at that problem, if it exists. In his contribution to the debate, the Minister might spend time providing reassurance on that issue, because, quite frankly, it is too easy to blame the prison officers and the staff in prisons and young offenders' centres.

Sue McAllister said that Hydebank was facing very challenging times, and we should all be concerned about that. Clearly, there has been a lack of leadership, direction and management on a day-to-day basis in that institution. The CJI report is not at all positive for that centre and for the wider prisons estate in Northern Ireland. The role of the Minister is crucial, and his actions and reactions to the reports and to the challenges that they highlight are also crucial and key to the resolution of those problems.

I had written down something, but Mr Maginness rather stole my thunder on this. Instead of the English or Irish solution to the problem, what we need, quite frankly, is a good old common-sense Ulster solution to an Ulster problem. The challenge for the Minister and for the House is to ensure that we get that solution: a solution that works and is demonstrably seen to be working; that provides a prisons estate, in this particular institution and across the estate, that benefits those in prison or young offenders' centres; and that gives reassurance to the people of Northern Ireland.

The lack of leadership and management is of real concern. We will not deliver the change that is required unless that direction and leadership is put in place. I listened to Mr Finlay Spratt at the Justice Committee a number of months ago, when he made very clear the point that Mr Givan made earlier; he and his colleagues have real concerns that Northern Ireland prison officers who have risen through the ranks, who know, who understand, who — let us be honest — served at the height of the threat in Northern Ireland and who gave good leadership and service to our country, are being overlooked and maybe even ignored for promotion in the Prison Service.

We need to be very concerned about that. The Minister needs to deal with that issue as well. We simply cannot have people disenfranchised because they are from Ulster.

Regarding management and leadership, the fact that there was no permanent governor or deputy governor is something that the Minister should be really concerned about. That is equally something that needs to be addressed.

I made this point a number of times, and I make no apology for making it again: it is for the Minister, in his response and reaction, through working with the Justice Committee, within his Department and with the Prison Service —

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

Mr Humphrey: — to build up relationships with the association. That is key to getting a resolution, and it will be watched by the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. A well-known quote came to mind when I was reading this report. It goes: a society can be judged on how it treats its prisoners. If that is the case, we would be judged very poorly.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on what is an important issue. We as politicians should have a keen interest in what happens in our prisons, particularly regarding women and young people in custody. They are the most vulnerable in society and very much without a voice.

This report confirms that there have been no improvements in the women's prison and young offenders' centre since the last report. In fact, there has been a regression in some aspects. Those two groups of prisoners are full of people with alcohol, drugs and mental health problems. In a nutshell, little is being done to address those problems unless it is being done to address the conditions in which they live. I agreed with Tom Elliott when he said that we should ask whether some of those people should be in prison at all.

In its final report, published exactly two years ago, the prison review team set out a compelling vision for an effective and efficient service, with those in custody at the core. That includes the targeting of services and programmes aimed at reducing the risk of offending. That was two years ago, and little has changed.

This issue was brought up by Mr Maginness, and I understand that fundamental change is proposed and the configuration of Hydebank as a secure college, and the building of a new purpose-built women's prison, will take time. However, the Minister must accept his failings to implement the most basic of changes. I agree that timescales need to be set regarding those two major issues.

In an answer to a question earlier this year, the Minister said he was hopeful that the next inspection of Hydebank Wood by the CJI would recognise significant improvements from the inspection in February this year. Clearly, that did not materialise. Rather than significant improvements, the chief inspector's report stated:

"Overall this was a disappointing inspection".

Responsibility for overall change is with you, Minister. Huge amounts of public money are being spent and wasted. Remember that this is the fourth CJI report into prisons here in eight years. For the approximately 70 women and 180 young people, safety, respect, purposeful activity and rehabilitation are not being delivered.

I and my two colleagues on the Justice Committee went into those two facilities on 4 September. Although we do

not profess to have the same skills as the inspectors, what we learned and heard is confirmed in this report. Those involved in the delivery of activities were frustrated at the lack of resources and limited activities in the young offenders' centre (YOC). There was no planned approach to purposeful activities. Everything was disjointed, which resulted in young people not being interested in taking up activities. That is confirmed in the report.

The computer suite was restrictive and controlled to the extent that few had positive experiences. Another problem was the cancellation of activities at the last minute. The governor himself told us in his office that, if he is down by five or six members of staff, the prison comes to almost gridlock, thus leading to longer lock-ups and a major impact on educational activities. In the afternoon of the same day, we went over to Maghaberry prison. In Roe House, staff were standing on each other's toes to ensure control over a small number of prisoners in what is a secure environment. In my opinion, that is bad use of staff resources. In 2013, it is not good enough that staffing is having a major impact on bringing about the fundamental change that is envisaged in the prison review team's report.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member's giving way. He will get an extra minute now. Does he not need to be a little bit cautious in his comments about Roe House, given the protest that went on for such a long period and that resulted in, of course, the murder of prison officer David Black by people who were involved in it? There was a need to have a secure environment during that protest. Obviously, things have now moved on. We just need to be a little bit wary about making those types of comments, given the environment that officers had to work in.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. I agree. However, in my opinion, Roe House is overstaffed for the number of prisoners who are there.

I will continue. The Minister cannot allow another report of that nature to happen, with similar outcomes for prisoners, or continue to let down the most vulnerable prisoners and society by not reducing reoffending and the continued waste of public funding. The Minister chairs the prison review oversight group that was set up to oversee the implementation of the recommendations that the prison review team made. He should make that a priority over the next six months. It is my opinion that he needs to ensure that change happens as soon as possible, otherwise his leadership on the issue will be called into question. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Anderson: I will speak in support of amendment No 1. Like my colleague William Humphrey, I commend prison staff for their dedication and commitment in carrying out their duties and services to the community over the past 40 years.

I accept that some serious concerns and criticisms are in the recent inspection reports on Ash House women's prison and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre. They need to be considered and addressed. However, I also feel that those reports' findings need to be set firmly in the context of the wider picture. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is unique. Like Northern Ireland society in general, it continues to bear the scars of years of terrorism and civil unrest. As the Prison Service seeks to move forward, the process of change and reform will require careful and sensitive handling. Some people are so keen to see our

prisons reformed with undue haste that they tend to forget that the terrorist threat has not completely gone away. It is just one year since David Black was brutally murdered simply because he wore the Prison Service uniform. The terrorist threat is still there.

Although I agree with some of the motion's sentiments, I feel that it does not take the complexities of the issues fully into account. That is why I ask the House to accept my party's amendment, which sets the specific issues of the two recent reports in the context of the ongoing Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme, which is, by any standards, a radical, challenging and fundamental prison reform programme. If prison reform on the basis of that programme is to be successful, it must have the support and, indeed, confidence of all the key players in the prison regime and the general public. It also must take Northern Ireland's unique circumstances into account. The recent report highlights a number of issues and lists around 150 recommendations. The inspectors expressed concerns that both prisons are on a downward spiral. I do not think that it is quite as dramatic as that.

As the director general of the Prison Service, Sue McAllister, has pointed out, those inspections were done in February at a time of great challenge for the Prison Service. For example, there was no permanent governor or deputy governor at Hydebank Wood. Many experienced officers had left due to early retirement. Making the point that the inspections came at a bad time is a reminder of the need for us to take a pragmatic approach to not only the staffing issue but the reform agenda in general. Ms McAllister also pointed out that, since then, there have been major changes and that some of the concerns in the reports have been or are being addressed. That needs to be taken into account.

I have to say that, although I am concerned with many of the findings, I do not agree with all the criticisms that the inspectors made. I am very much in favour of a humane and dignified prison regime. I feel that we already have that. When you hear the horror stories of people from the United Kingdom being held in foreign jails of one sort or another, it makes you realise that even the worst of our prison conditions are not so bad. So, we need to take those matters in context.

12.00 noon

As I said, we must take note of the reports' findings and recommendations. For example, we need to be very sure that everything possible is being done to reduce the risk of suicide and self-harming and to develop and enhance support mechanisms.

I come back to the issue of staffing and management. I fear that quite a few of the problems stem from reductions in staffing, and I am not sure that changes in that crucial area are always being managed in the way in which they should be.

An academic has said that problems over the treatment of women and young offenders will continue until more managers are recruited from outside Northern Ireland. That, to me, is not a logical statement. I believe that we must recruit the best managers, and perhaps we might find them in Northern Ireland.

We must never forget that a prison is a prison and not a holiday camp. I listened to a debate on prison reform on the radio recently, and the focus was almost entirely on the welfare of prisoners. Welfare is indeed important, but those who are in prison are there to serve a sentence for crimes of one sort or another, and it is essential that the public have confidence in the prison regime.

One of the criticisms in the reports is about excessive strip-searching of female prisoners. Such a practice should never be excessive, but we must be very sure that it is adequate in order to control the availability and use of drugs in our prisons. I am concerned about the drug culture in our prisons, and it is vital that we protect the safety of staff and prisoners. Finlay Spratt of the Prison Officers' Association has a case when he suggests that we should look at modern technology as an alternative to strip-searching.

I have touched on only a few issues, but we are dealing here with a wide range of hugely complex issues. That is why we need to —

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

Mr Anderson: — review exactly where we are with the efficiency and effectiveness programme and make every effort to ensure that we have the support and confidence of stakeholders as we move forward.

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

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I welcome the opportunity to address the issues that were raised in the recent inspection reports on Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and the women's prison.

I wish to put on record my appreciation for the work of the chief inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection and his team and that of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.

Like many Members, I was certainly concerned by the findings in the two reports, and although they highlighted many challenges, it is important that the findings are put in context — a point that Mr Anderson made. There is no doubt that the inspection took place at a difficult time, in February this year. The Prison Service had an ongoing reform programme, with significant change taking place, and the inspection of Hydebank Wood came at a time when many experienced officers either had left or were in the process of leaving under the voluntary early retirement scheme. Although new staff had come in, there were staffing shortages at the time of the inspection. Those shortages were compounded by the fact that many staff were unable or unwilling to undertake overtime duties.

Furthermore, as Members said, at the time of the inspection, there was no permanent occupancy of the posts of governor and deputy governor. Those positions have now been filled. On the point about filling posts, a number of Members said that when it comes to promotion staff feel — as one Member put it — disenfranchised. The reality is that there is open recruitment to the senior posts that we are talking about. Recruitment is done on the basis that we appoint the best person for the job. That is the single most important criterion. I think that it would be very difficult to suggest that that should not be the case. The reality is that very few posts in the Prison Service have been filled by staff other than those based in Northern Ireland.

If we look at the reports, we see that they were a snapshot of what was happening back in February. The new governor and his team at Hydebank Wood are addressing the reports' major issues of concern. They are continuing to work with colleagues, particularly those on the healthcare side from the South Eastern Trust. Of course, as Members should know, the trust has the lead responsibility for prisoner healthcare, and the work being done between them is aimed at delivering an appropriate and fitting regime.

The reports highlighted some specific issues, many of which have been mentioned already, and I wish to address a number of them today. It is absolutely clear from the report — I think that nearly every Member who spoke highlighted this — that the inspection's overall rating of Ash House was heavily influenced by its collocation in the YOC. Indeed, the report points to the fact that physical conditions in Ash House were good and clean. I agree, and have agreed for a long time, that collocation of female prisoners and young offenders on the same site is far from ideal. I can assure members that I remain committed to providing that new separate facility for women offenders, and, as Members are aware, I will make a statement on the prison reform programme next week, which will include specific details on the plans for women in prison. I assure Ms McCorley and others that that will be very much based on building on the Inspire model and similar examples — for example, one that I saw recently in Scotland — to look at a better way of managing women offenders.

The report also highlighted the searching of female prisoners, and I can inform the House that women are no longer routinely strip-searched, as the report terms it without actually describing it. Strip-searching in that context means women being stripped to their underwear. Searching is carried out now on the basis of intelligence across the different prison establishments rather than a routine search of all people at particular stages.

I am in no way attempting to play down the serious issues raised in the report, but it is important that we also recognise, as some Members have acknowledged, that the inspectors found examples of good practice. Alban Maginness highlighted positive staff and prisoner engagement, and the report also states that positive role modelling is encouraged. It commended faith services and said that the provision of mental health services had improved since the last inspection. It is hardly a downward spiral in that respect. Importantly, it found that each prisoner has a sentence manager and that offender management arrangements are good.

I want to point out that, in addition to the appointments at senior level — the governor and deputy governor at Hydebank — a number of significant changes have taken place at leadership level in the Prison Service in recent months. We have a new director of offender policy and operations, who was appointed since this inspection, and, at the beginning of September, the new director of rehabilitation took up post. Those are very important posts in the Prison Service. The director general now has in place an experienced, well-motivated and determined leadership team that will deliver the necessary changes, not only at Hydebank but across the service.

We all know that reforming our prisons remains a key priority. It is not an issue for me for the next six months; it has been current for me for the past three years and will

continue to be so because the reform of our Prison Service is one of the biggest challenges facing us collectively. As with any change on this scale, it is challenging, and implementation will take time. It will not happen overnight, and that is why we have a change programme in place that is timed to run until April 2015 and is on track to deliver by that date.

From the outset, I have said that implementing the reforms will not be a single event but a process, and that remains the case. Reports such as this make me more determined to see the reforms go through and more convinced that we are addressing the right issues. As the motion says, most of the issues highlighted in the report are being addressed as part of the reform programme. Although the report highlights that a number of issues had not been resolved satisfactorily in February, I am reassured that they are being addressed as part of the wider programme.

With any major reform programme, the pace of change can feel frustrating at times, and there is no doubt that that is the case with this programme, but the next year is a critical period for the Prison Service, when many of the recommendations from the Owers report will become real. My statement to the House next week will give a detailed progress report against those recommendations. That will include positive developments with learning and skills in our prisons; more detail on the prison estate; plans to establish the Hydebank college; and the development of our staff.

To deliver any reform programme of this type, it is vital that strong governance and strategic foundations are put in place. That is driven and led by the prison reform oversight group, which brings together the key people responsible for delivery and has a strong and robust independent element. As chair, I am fully aware of how strong and robust that independent element is, as the group meets quarterly to review operations and the independent members engage with a variety of stakeholders between meetings and robustly hold to account Prison Service staff at those meetings. That provides me with, and it should provide the House with, considerable reassurance.

The challenge of reforming the Prison Service falls not only to the management and staff in NIPS but, as I have acknowledged, to my Department, other Departments, particularly the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and beyond.

My Department will continue to work across government to ensure that we have a joined-up approach to prison reform. Of course, the partnership does not just end with other Departments. Over the past year, nine stakeholder events have taken place with statutory, voluntary and community partners. Just last week, the Prison Service held two stakeholder events to update partners on the reform programme. This engagement is an important part of the programme, and it will continue into the future.

The Prison Service is an organisation in transition. Many people inside and outside government are working to make that change a reality. I am greatly encouraged by the work that is being done to reform our prisons. As with any major reform programme, the challenge is to build on that work, to see it through to April 2015 and to ensure that the progress that has been made to date continues and that all necessary work is delivered on that timescale. I assure Members that I remain resolute today to ensure we have

a prison system that delivers secure and safer prisons, has a professional and effectively led service and places the offender firmly at the centre of our work. That is how we will help offenders to reduce their risk of reoffending. That will only be good for the wider community in Northern Ireland. That is what the prison review team envisaged. That is what I am determined to deliver, and I trust that, when I report more fully next week on the progress that has been made, that will provide evidence to the House of how today's motion is being put into practice.

Mr Hussey: I begin by apologising to the Members whose speeches I missed. I had to leave the Chamber for a short time, and I apologise to them for that.

I am pleased that the House has had the opportunity to debate the issue today. When the two reports referenced in the motion were originally published by Criminal Justice Inspection, my colleague Tom Elliott attempted to raise the matter by way of a question for urgent oral answer. The Speaker did not see fit to allow it; however, our party has had that opportunity in this debate.

We are all aware that the Northern Ireland Prison Service is halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015. The Justice Minister has assured us that the senior management team has set out a clear direction of travel for the Prison Service based on the 40 recommendations of the prison review team's report. To date, nine of those have been fully implemented, with the remaining recommendations due to be completed at various stages over the next 18 months. I hope that we are on track to deliver this, and the Minister referred to "delivery" several times in his speech.

I want to deal specifically with the situation at Hydebank. The reports were certainly a wake-up call as to where we are with prison reform. As a general point, we should not underestimate the seriousness of the concern in the House over the state of affairs at Hydebank when the inspection was carried out. CJI outlined clearly that it had significant concerns around the performance of the two prisons, so much so that 156 recommendations were made. Some of the most pressing deficiencies related to spending too much time in cells, a lack of prisoner access to work and education, the approach to violence reduction and a lack of learning from recent deaths in custody.

I note that the inspection at Hydebank Wood was carried out less than a year into the current reform programme. I also note that since then a new director of offender policy and operations has been appointed and that last month the first director of rehabilitation for the Northern Ireland Prison Service took up his post. At the time of the inspection, there was also no permanent occupancy of the posts of governor and deputy governor at Hydebank Wood. I am pleased that those posts have now been filled and a new senior management team is in place in the establishment.

I welcome the steps taken since the inspection, but that does not excuse the terrible standard that was evident at the time. The Ulster Unionist Party made its position clear on publication of the reports: the buck has to stop with the senior management of the Prison Service and, indeed, with the Minister. It has been mentioned before and I again mention the fact that prison officers in Northern Ireland have given unrivalled service in their field at really challenging times throughout the worst days of the

Troubles. It is appropriate that we today again remember David Black and the service that he gave to the Prison Service and to this country. I again put on record in the House my total respect for how the Black family dealt with the terrible circumstances that befell them and for the Prison Service generally for the way that it dealt with that bereavement.

I believe that prison officers stand ready and willing to offer a first-class service, but they need support and resources from their superiors. The Ulster Unionist Party seeks support for our amendment in the knowledge that the Minister must take ownership and complete this reform.

12.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they should not make reference to the Speaker's previous decisions. That is the custom and practice of the House, which should be obeyed.

Mr Wells: I apologise that I was not here for all the speeches. I had to deal with an urgent health-related issue that lasted somewhat longer than expected.

I support the amendment and want to deal with some of the issues that have been raised. In his contribution, the Chair of the Justice Committee, Mr Paul Givan, raised the frequent turnover in senior staff in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. I have been on the Committee for just over two and a half years, and I have to say that I have been astounded at the different faces that appear before me so frequently. I hope that now we will at least have some form of long-term consistency, because the lack of that is undoubtedly inhibiting the ongoing reform programme in the Prison Service. It has been quite a shock to learn this morning, for instance, that Ronnie Armour has been moved on. I found the relationship between Mr Armour and the Committee and, indeed, individual MLAs to be a very good one. He was always available at the end of the phone when an issue arose urgently, and it is unfortunate that, yet again, someone of considerable experience has been moved at short notice. Fundamental change can occur, as the Chair said, only if we have consistency of senior management. The SEE programme is a four-year programme, rolled out until 2015; it will not work if we constantly change the faces at the table.

The Chair raised another issue that is very worrying. I keep saying this, but I was elected in 1982, perhaps before other people in the Chamber were born, certainly some of the ladies. I see that no one is denying that statement. I must say that it was always thus: I can never remember a time when the relationship between the POA and the senior governors at any of our prisons was good. It has always been fraught with controversy. This is an issue that, on devolution, we can no longer blame direct rule Ministers for. Now that we have devolution, it is incumbent on the Minister, senior directors in the Prison Service and the unions to get together to bury some hatchets and reach agreement, because we will not achieve all that we wish to in the Prison Service until that issue is addressed. Of all the public sector areas, that relationship is particularly bad and seems to have remained in a 1970s stupor that has not moved on, unlike other relationships between unions and management.

Ms McCorley said that she did not accept that it was right to have a mix of women and young people in a single state

prison function. A risk assessment is carried out by senior management, and they have deemed that appropriate at the moment. We all wish that we had the resources to move things on, but there is not a great deal of evidence to show that either the young offenders' or the women's treatment is being affected by their coexistence.

Tom Elliott made the point that this is a senior management responsibility, and that bears out what Mr Givan said. Stewart Dickson made the most extraordinary statement. He said that it was MLAs' responsibility to support the Minister. I do not see it as my role to support the Minister; I see it as my role to scrutinise the Minister and to hold him to account. I know that the Alliance Back-Benchers see it as their role to be cheerleaders for their Minister and constantly argue that all swans are black and crows are white, but that is not even his role as a very obedient Back-Bencher who is no doubt aspiring to great office. At times, you have to ask even your own Minister difficult questions.

William Humphrey made the point that this solution should be made in Ulster. Of course, we are all part of the United Kingdom — we all accept that — and, therefore, we cannot say that, because someone has done most of their training in the Prison Service in England, Scotland or Wales, they should be denied an opportunity to work in Northern Ireland. Indeed, we have benefited enormously from folk who have come over from Scotland and England to take on the management of the Prison Service. However, equally, in the interests of consistency, we should have a greater role for Northern Ireland-bred talent. It strikes me as a bit worrying that, every now and then, when someone reaches the higher echelons of the Prison Service, suddenly, out of nowhere, they disappear overnight without explanation.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Givan: I am sure that the Member agrees that Northern Ireland should never be regarded as a training ground for people to spend short periods in before going back to a better promotion elsewhere.

Mr Wells: At times, Northern Ireland is a nurturing ground for talent; people come here to cut their teeth in a difficult situation and then move on to the higher echelons in GB. There is nothing wrong with that, but, if we become too dependent on that happening in the Province, the Prison Service will suffer.

Seán Lynch said that he believed that there was a shortage of staff in our prisons and that we would be judged on how we treated our prisoners. I do not think that the public would agree with some of that. I think that he was referring to a situation in which he saw a preponderance of staff in a particular prison, but he failed to mention that there was an ongoing protest in that wing that required additional staff. You cannot have it both ways: you cannot give tacit support to protests and then complain when extra staff are brought in.

Sydney Anderson mentioned the need to promote local staff. He also raised an issue about the timing of the inspection.

Ross Hussey rightly brought us back to —

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

Mr Wells: — David Black. We pay tribute to him, his family and all the courageous work that he did in the Prison Service.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an ruín. I support the motion, the terms of which were laid out by Rosaleen McCorley and Seán Lynch. They gave a sense of what the two reports were about: one was about the young offenders' centre and the other was about the women's prison, which are both based in Hydebank Wood.

The Minister and Alban Maginness said that the reports were like snapshots, that perhaps there was a feeling that we have been here before and that now is the time to take stock. We accept that. The difference on this occasion is that the Owers report and the other prison reform programme are now being rolled out, so you would expect it to be analysed against that. I think that most people accept that the inspections to date by Criminal Justice Inspection not just of prisons but of other issues that it has brought to the attention of the Assembly have been done in a very objective manner. Of course, there are aspects that we might, at times, feel could have been stronger or weaker, but, in general terms, it does excellent work. That is why it is important that, whatever we say or do, it is very much with that in mind. CJI will point out the weaknesses. It also pointed out the strengths of the two establishments. Perhaps there will sometimes be an emphasis on the weaknesses, and the strengths can be overlooked. We have to acknowledge that there are strengths and good work is going on. It is the task of all of us to ensure that the weaknesses are addressed to get the situation to the level that we all want to see.

We were supportive of the need for the Owers report at the Hillsborough negotiations. The Minister then commissioned a report. It can be broken down into smaller elements. To me and my party, it was about the need for change and dynamic leadership. Leadership comes at not just a senior level; it can and should be at every level in any organisation, particularly in the Prison Service. The Owers report, the SEE programme and all the other changes provided the opportunity to bring about what most people accepted was the need for prison reform. People can pore over what went before — perhaps we spend too much time poring over what went before — but here was an opportunity to programme for the future by having a forward-looking outlook and ensuring that we brought to the core of whatever we did the need for rehabilitation. I look at some of the changes in that regard. We have welcomed them, which is the proper way to go.

I am conscious that the Deputy Speaker has said that, if amendment No 1 is supported, the Question on amendment No 2 will not be put. We would have been supportive of both. It is understandable, from the way in which people have approached the debate this morning, that, when we put forward the Owers report, it was not about asking people to endorse it chapter and verse; it was about the broad thrust. All Members who spoke this morning talked about that. Critical to that is the statement that the Minister headlined for next week, and we await the outcome of that. The oversight group has an important role in all this, and it has to give the snapshot. So, whatever about the lack of leadership at Hydebank in February when the report was made, it is where we should be.

Seán Lynch made an observation about protests. Sometimes it is difficult, because you are giving a version

of what someone else has told you, but you did not wish to do that. The senior management people whom we met at Hydebank in September talked about difficulties with staffing levels in the prison, and they made the point to us that a small number of staff can have a great impact on the regime. All of us come at this from different angles, and, as I said, good aspects are being carried out. Core to all of this — this is where the Minister is talking about prison estates and staffing levels — is that both reports' forewords say clearly that a big measurement of our prisons is how often people are locked up and locked down and the purposeful activity that they carry out when they are outside. That gives all the people who want to work with prisoners on rehabilitation the time, space and opportunity to do so.

It was interesting that Tom Elliott, quoting the POA from as far back as 2006, said that it was not blameless. It has to analyse where it was to blame and what the obstruction is. It is worrying to hear that there is now a breakdown. We know that, in the past, a breakdown in relationships within the prison regimes led to fragmentation and, when they are fragmented, the prisoners suffer. Everybody here in the Chamber this morning has accepted that they are the people whom we have to work with because they are the most vulnerable. So, if prisoners are in their cells, the education, the learning and skills programmes and the health service — all those elements — are broken down. Therefore, it is in none of our interests to have a relationship where the leadership, whether it is the management team, the POA or staff, are at odds with each other. That is not the way to take this forward. It is critical that we say this, because a new management team is now in place at Hydebank and we cannot afford to have similar criticisms made in a year's time. From listening to that governor, I think that some of those criticisms will be made in the future if we do not tackle staffing levels. That is why we should not look at Hydebank or the women's prison in isolation from the overall package. One of the recommendations in the Owers report was for the reconfiguration of Maghaberry. That should be a priority, because such a reconfiguration could help to ease staffing levels, which will impact on the other establishments, particularly Hydebank Wood. We found it enlightening and, I am sure, the senior staff found it frustrating that as few as five or six people can have such an impact on a regime.

On a wider point, as we have said in Committee and in our discussions with the management when we have been in Maghaberry, Hydebank and Magilligan, the measurement of people out of their cells and the measurement of purposeful activity is a big part of prison regimes. So, management is supportive. Seán Lynch made an observation about the protests at Roe House and Bush House. We realise that there are complexities in that, but our observation and that of other people is that those blocks are overstaffed. The small cadre that could be released could have an impact on the wider prison regime, which would have an wider impact on prison reform.

It is difficult to stand here and say — the Minister alluded to this point — that the next report, particularly on Ash House, will not make similar observations while the women's prison remains in Hydebank Wood. Despite the best efforts of people in there, it is accepted that the women's regime is impacted by the fact that most of the services, including health and learning skills, are affected by their location. The governor said that he would wish

women to have more movement around the establishment but that is curtailed by the fact that it is co-located. He even talked about, in one instance, having to put up screens to block views. That is not the way in which we should go forward. The Minister should have that as a priority when he looks at the estate review, because it would have a qualitative impact. I am not saying that it would underwrite or guarantee a better report, but, in our opinion — I think that most people would agree — while Ash House remains co-located, you will have that problem. We have to realise that.

12.30 pm

It was worrying to hear this morning about the breakdown of relationships. Attention should be given to that. One of the main planks of the Owers report concerned leadership, and leadership has to be given. I do not think that we can have a situation in which one part of the system can dictate to the rest. It is important that we do that as we go forward. Whatever the reform package is and whatever projection and outcome is in place, that is what we should all work for. Anyone who prevents it for sectional or narrow reasons has to be faced down so that we do not come back here in a year or 18 months and say, "Here we go again". I welcome the fact that the POA accepts that it is not blameless; that gives you some sense that it perhaps wants to work its way out of this. On a lighter note, it is not often that I find myself in agreement with Finlay Spratt, but he said in Committee —

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

Mr McCartney: — that there is no English solution to an Irish problem. Maybe that is something that could be taken wider.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording will have changed to such an extent that it would not be in order to put the Question on it.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the findings contained in the Criminal Justice Inspection's reports on Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre; notes that the Owers review highlighted most of the issues raised in these reports; and calls on the Minister of Justice to review the implementation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme to ensure support from all relevant stakeholders taking forward the reform programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

NAMA

1. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has had any recent discussions with the National Assets Management Agency and whether there are any plans for the disposal of assets in Northern Ireland. (AQT 221/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

I thank the Member for his question. I had a very recent discussion with the chairman of the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA), along with members of the Northern Ireland advisory committee. We met last Monday in Parliament Buildings. That was my first meeting with Mr Daly in my capacity as Finance Minister. It was a very useful meeting, given the extent of the assets that NAMA has in Northern Ireland; the nominal value of its assets in Northern Ireland is around £3.5 billion.

As the Member will be aware, NAMA has been selling assets off as it becomes viable to sell them off. Obviously, we were all very concerned at the creation of NAMA. My predecessor in this post very assiduously worked with his counterpart, the late Brian Lenihan, who was Finance Minister in the Irish Republic at that time, to ensure that the fears that many of us had that there could be a fire sale of assets in Northern Ireland did not materialise. Obviously we were very concerned about that happening. NAMA was keen to point out that not only has there not been a fire sale but, through the ability to lend to developers for viable propositions, it has put some £140 million into the local economy. That has seen various developments go forward, including a housing development of 90 units in Dundonald in east Belfast, and some significant commercial property in the centre of Belfast.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Mr Elliott that, yesterday, the Speaker drew attention to topical questions at times overlapping or infringing on questions for oral answer that have already been tabled. Having drawn attention to that, I will be listening very carefully to your supplementary question.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Principal Deputy Speaker. I did not realise that there was an overlap. Apologies for that, if there was.

Does the Minister consider it likely that the Ulster Bank could be partly exchanged for British loans and investments currently owned by NAMA? Would there be any likely implications for Northern Ireland in that?

Mr Hamilton: There may be well be a tad of an overlap there.

I do not think that that is a likely option. I have met my counterpart in the Irish Republic, Michael Noonan, and

the issue has been raised, and I do not get any sense of longing for such a swap as the Member has described.

Obviously, the future of the Ulster Bank is something that we are very closely monitoring, not least because of its significant size in Northern Ireland; it is the biggest lending bank in Northern Ireland. Despite its problems and the issues it is currently dealing with, it has a 30-plus percentage share of the market in Northern Ireland because it is the only bank we have that is nationally owned at a UK level. It is frequently the only one that avails itself of various national lending initiatives.

So, for all its travails and all the difficulties it has faced and continues to face, the future of the Ulster Bank is something that we are concerned about. We want to see it operating in Northern Ireland as a properly functioning bank. It is incredibly critical to our economy that the Ulster Bank functions properly and is able to get loans out to businesses so that they can start to grow and employ people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that the Member listed for question 4 has withdrawn her name within the appropriate time frame.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

2. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what he has done to advance the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) issue beyond merely lobbying London Ministers, given that he has agreed the possibility of devolving DVA functions to the Executive in conjunction with the Minister of the Environment and his recognition of the importance of the 300 jobs, plus the attendant jobs, in Coleraine. (AQT 222/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At the outset, I want to clarify that vehicle licensing and registration is a reserved matter and is not devolved to the Assembly, as we know. To date, I have had no discussions with the Minister, although it is an issue that has been discussed at Executive level. The Minister of the Environment is following on from his predecessor in trying to lobby for and argue that what the 300-plus staff in Coleraine do is a vital part of the entire DVA operation for the whole of the United Kingdom and, whatever happens with a move towards more online processing of car tax, that there is still a role for those staff in Coleraine.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Will the Minister assure the House that he will take a look at consulting the unions, the workforce and, perhaps, Coleraine Borough Council?

Mr Hamilton: The Minister of the Environment has greater policy oversight in this area than I do. Just because I do not have direct responsibility does not mean that I do not share his concerns, the Member's concerns or the concerns of any representative from that area or, indeed, right across Northern Ireland for the future of that function that is performed at Coleraine. However, the Minister of the Environment is better placed to take the issue forward. He has set up meetings with the relevant Transport Minister, Mr Stephen Hammond, to deal with the issue. It is an issue that is better pursued on a one-to-one level by him, with the support of me and other Executive colleagues.

Banking

3. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the issues discussed at the first meeting of the joint ministerial task force on banking. (AQT 223/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for raising this issue. It is very important, and it follows on from some of the points that Mr Elliott raised. Arlene Foster, the Minister of Enterprise, and I represent Northern Ireland on the joint ministerial task force, which was created out of the economic pact agreed by the Prime Minister and the First and deputy First Minister in June. It is one of the most significant aspects of that pact, because, as we all know, and the Member will know from his constituency experience, the inability of good businesses to get the finance that they need to grow is inhibiting our ability to recover as an economy. So, the fact that that task force has been created is an acceptance and an acknowledgement at a national Government level that there is a particular problem here in Northern Ireland that is often very distinct from banking issues that affect Great Britain.

At that meeting, we had a broad-ranging discussion on about six issues. We discussed the strategic importance of making progress on access to finance to economic recovery in Northern Ireland. We discussed the very different structure of banking that we have in Northern Ireland, where there is less penetration by the big five banks, as I would describe them, in Great Britain. We talked about legacy issues, primarily the property overhang that many businesses in Northern Ireland experience.

We also talked about the issue that Mr Elliott raised, which is the future of the Ulster Bank, particularly in the context of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards. We looked at national lending initiatives and their operation in Northern Ireland. Finally, we discussed how we could improve the data sets that we, as an Executive, receive to inform us better about what lending is going on out there in the community.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive and detailed reply. How can national lending initiatives become more effective here in Northern Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: That was one of the key issues that we discussed at length at the first meeting of the task force. It was raised specifically because my colleague Arlene Foster and I have been concerned for some time that national lending initiatives, which have been rolled out to much fanfare in Great Britain for the whole of the United Kingdom, have not operated properly or at all here in Northern Ireland. There are two principal reasons for that. The first reason is the different banking structure that we have. So, when they are unveiling those sorts of initiatives in Great Britain and enforcing them on the big five banks, only one of those big five banks — the Ulster Bank, through its ownership by RBS — is operating in Northern Ireland.

The second reason is that many of those solutions are not tailored to the Northern Ireland problem, which is the issue of having a property overhang. It is not so much an issue of reducing the price of lending, which is what many of the initiatives at a national level have been focused on; it has been about the availability of lending here in Northern Ireland and the risk inherent within that.

I was very encouraged by the discussion that we had because we looked at how we might be able to tailor some of those initiatives for Northern Ireland. Some of the thresholds and entry levels have been far too high for the economy that we have in Northern Ireland, where most of our businesses are small- to medium-sized.

The very high thresholds have put banks off getting involved in, for example, the funding for lending scheme and the enterprise finance guarantee scheme. As an Executive, we believe that those schemes can be tailored for the Northern Ireland environment.

We received a very positive response from Treasury and the Business Department when they said that there might be scope for tailoring some of those funds and channelling them through existing funds, such as the growth loan fund, which is administered by Invest Northern Ireland, so that we can get that funding into the economy here in Northern Ireland and out to businesses that need it so badly.

Help-to-buy Scheme

5. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to update the House on the operation of the Help-to-buy Scheme in Northern Ireland. (AQT 225/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Help-to-buy Scheme is another of these national initiatives. It is aimed at getting the mortgage market going. The Help-to-buy mortgage guarantee scheme is available right across the United Kingdom and has been taken up by quite a few of the big high street banks, including RBS — not the Ulster Bank, although I understand that it is considering it — Lloyds, Halifax, which lends in Northern Ireland, and, in the past week, Barclays. I saw a report yesterday that stated that Nationwide is the only big mortgage lender in Great Britain that is not part of the Help-to-buy mortgage guarantee scheme.

It is an attractive scheme in that the Government will guarantee up to 15% of a property, meaning that only a 5% mortgage deposit is required from those who might want to get onto the property ladder. This scheme and our highly successful and now exceptionally well-funded co-ownership scheme have the potential to assist in the recovery of the Northern Ireland housing market.

Although there has been some criticism of the scheme at a national level because of the fear that it might overheat the housing market in London and the south-east, I think that most of us here would accept any sort of heat in the housing market in certain parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for the response. Will he work with the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the banks to encourage participation in the schemes?

Mr Hamilton: Absolutely. My DSD colleague, Minister Nelson McCausland, and I plan to meet local banks in the not-too-distant-future to discuss how Help-to-buy, in concert with the likes of the co-ownership scheme, might be able to offer some assistance to the recovery of the Northern Ireland housing market. It is important that we meet the banks to show our support for the scheme as a Government, and to ask them how, if there are particular reasons why they are not getting involved in Northern Ireland, we could iron out those problems with the Westminster Government through the joint ministerial task force. That is, in some ways, allied to the question that Lord Morrow asked.

It would be a shame if a scheme that is operating and functioning in mainland Great Britain and that has the potential to help people in Northern Ireland to get onto the property ladder and start to get the housing market moving — just like the enterprise finance guarantee scheme for business — is not operating in Northern Ireland because local banks are not joining it. So, if there is anything that I can do, that Nelson McCausland can do or that the Executive can do to encourage local banks to get involved in this scheme or even to use it as an opportunity to highlight the products that they have to encourage people to get onto the property ladder, that would be a useful use of our time.

Agrifood Loan Scheme

6. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the agrifood loan scheme will work. (AQT 226/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The scheme that the Member refers to is the scheme that the Enterprise Minister and I launched at the start of this month. It seeks to enable us to avail ourselves of a major opportunity that we believe is there for local food processors and producers. The horse meat scandal that we were all only too familiar with in recent times has seen large supermarkets wanting to go back to sourcing their meat products from the UK. Obviously, therefore, there is a potential gap in the market for suppliers to get into.

We, in conjunction with the industry, identified that as an area of opportunity. However, the problem was that farmers who wanted to build more chicken houses and accommodation for pigs, poultry, and so forth, did not have the ability to access the finance that they required; they were being asked to do so at very high levels of security. The scheme that we have brought forward is in conjunction with banks to the extent that people will have to complete only one application form when they go in. There will not be multiple application forms, with one for government, one for the banks, and so on. We will work with the banks to lend money on commercial terms, with government money subordinate to the banks' money but, significantly, with lower security. That will allow those farmers to seize that opportunity. It is being rolled out initially in the poultry sector, and we have committed £10 million in the first phase, with a commitment to give more money to the scheme as it develops.

2.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is the end of the period for topical questions. We will now move on to the questions for oral answer that have been listed for the Minister.

Shared Future: Peace III

1. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact of Peace III funding on delivering a shared future. (AQO 4794/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The Peace III programme and associated funding has a specific focus on reconciling communities and contributing towards a shared society. By the end of September 2013, the programme had attained expenditure of €193.7 million contributing towards that goal.

The programme has funded a wide range of projects, including large-scale capital developments with the creation of new shared spaces as their priority. Such projects aim to tackle the separation of communities by encouraging the development of physical environments that are not marked out as the territory of one side of the community. Through peace and reconciliation action plans, it has also enabled local authority-led peace partnerships to support initiatives at a local level in conflict resolution and challenging sectarianism and racism. Through the consortium of the Community Relations Council and Pobal, funding has been awarded to 94 projects with the aim of acknowledging and dealing with the past. Beneficiaries of, and participants in, the Peace programme have been surveyed and were found to be more likely to engage in contact with the other community — as neighbours, friends and work colleagues — and more likely to trust the other community.

By building cross-community trust, the Peace III programme helps to lay foundations for stability and thereby for political and economic progress and a shared future. However, I am sure that the Member agrees that it is incumbent on us all to work towards that goal.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his answer. I certainly agree with him that, although the European peace and reconciliation work has been hugely beneficial to building a shared future in Northern Ireland, we in the Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive need to take leadership in that issue.

The EU Peace IV reconciliation programme prioritises the delivery of shared services. I welcome that the Minister has made a priority of delivering innovative and efficient public services. Given that the Deloitte report of 2007 found that it cost £1 billion a year to deliver segregated services, what policies will the Minister put in place to ensure that Departments prioritise shared services over segregated services?

Mr Hamilton: Everyone acknowledges that a lot of money is spent in Northern Ireland on providing services for two sides of the community, and, at a time when we have straitened public finances, that is not the best use of those finances. Equally, I am sure that the Member would agree that, if it were just a matter of our laying out everything that we desire and clicking our fingers to make all that division disappear, we would do it. However, it is not, and I think that the Member knows and would acknowledge that it is significantly more difficult than that.

I am not entirely sure how roll-out of shared services such as those that the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) administers would lead us in the direction of getting over divisions. Those services are, for example, shared IT or use of HR facilities in the Civil Service or broad public sector. Sometimes it is difficult to get over the divisions inside the public sector and in the silos in Departments, never mind those in society in Northern Ireland.

However, I am exceptionally open to looking at anything that will help, as I know my colleagues in the Executive are. We have backed that up through our commitment through Peace funding and the match funding that Departments have provided. We have done that through the 'Together: Building a United Community' document, which has some very ambitious plans and targets for bringing our community together. However, we must

always recognise that this is not as easy a process as any of us want it to be.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. What work has been done with the Protestant, unionist and loyalist community to encourage uptake of Peace III funding opportunities?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I am well aware that this has been a criticism of the Peace programmes in the past. It remains a criticism of the Peace programme that, although projects are not Protestant or Catholic as such, and although there is no delineation of funding between one community and another, there is evidence that there has not been an equity of funding towards the Protestant community. SEUPB has been instructed to engage with the Protestant community to encourage applications, and a significant amount of time and resource has been invested in encouraging greater involvement and more applications, and, most importantly, I think, in developing the capacity within the Protestant, unionist and loyalist community to make those applications. I think that we have seen some increase, although marginal, from Peace I to Peace III. There has been an increase in uptake of about 2%. It is still not enough. It is not where it should be, and I want to see it higher. I want to see SEUPB continue the engagement that it has started, and that has borne some fruit, but I want to see it do a lot more.

SEUPB has already carried out extensive outreach work, and it has brought forward better, bigger and more fundable projects from the broad Protestant community. I will highlight two of them. One is Skainos, which is not too far away from here on the Newtownards Road. It is a community project valued at £6 million for that community, and it is doing a fine job. The other project is the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland's REACH project, which has a value of £3.6 million. Therefore, you can see that there have been more significant projects coming forward from the Protestant, unionist and loyalist community so that they can avail themselves of that Peace funding, which is every bit as much theirs as it is anybody else's.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Sorry for popping up earlier, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I am a better timekeeper than I realise. In any case, I thank the Minister for his answer. He will recall that a number of groups in receipt of Peace moneys had their letters of offer withdrawn. Will that money be repayable to Europe by the groups involved or will it be a charge on the public purse?

Mr Hamilton: That is a fairly cryptic question from the Member. Without knowing precisely what groups and projects he is talking about, it is very hard for me to say what will happen to the money that he is speaking about. If he wants to raise particular issues with me afterwards or in correspondence, I am sure that I will be able to give him the answer that he is looking for.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Can he detail how applications to Peace III are classified, if indeed they are, to monitor and ensure that funding is dispersed proportionately and fairly across community, cross-community and other sectoral interests?

Mr Hamilton: It is not as easy as you might think to say that a project belongs to one community or another

community. I am aware of that being the case in capital infrastructure projects in particular, where the project would serve both sides of the community but be classified as being part of one side because the predominant community in the area is one side of the community. I am thinking particularly of the Peace Bridge in Londonderry, which, although serving both sides of that community, was scored as being Roman Catholic because it was physically located in the Derry City Council area, which is predominantly Roman Catholic. That is why it is hard to pinpoint this.

Some projects are much clearer to identify than others, but there is a difficulty, particularly on the capital infrastructure side, in saying, "That's a Protestant project, that's a Catholic project." However, it is not that we should avoid this. There is clearly a problem with the lack of uptake, and even with applying, never mind applying and not succeeding, as the Member will know for the likes of Belfast. That is why it is useful that we monitor the figures and keep on top of them. Doing so allows us to identify where there might be problems, and it allows us to target our resources, as we have done, through the extensive outreach work that SEUPB has done.

The Member is right to identify that it is not as simple as saying, "That belongs to one side, and that belongs to another", because, as we know, projects are, by their nature, open to everybody, especially on the capital side of things.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 13 has been withdrawn.

Procurement

2. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what aspect of quality is measured in procurement for public projects of £5 million and above. (AQO 4795/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. Public procurements above £5 million are subject to the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and the European Union directive on public procurement. That legislation permits the awarding of public contracts on the basis of lowest price or most economically advantageous tender, both of which incorporate quality considerations.

In the procurement of public projects of £5 million and above, various aspects of quality may be measured through the following approaches: at selection stage, through an assessment of the quality of those firms seeking to tender on the resources and technical ability that they possess; and at the award stage, through the specification and contract requirements that require adherence to standards or performance measures and/or evaluation of bids against specific quality criteria.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I hear what he is saying but there are concerns in the construction industry that these projects are based 100% on price because DFP has changed the criteria. Does he not agree that there is a significant risk to getting public value when you remove quality from procurement criteria?

Mr Hamilton: I understand the Member's point and the concerns that some may have. The policy change, which is permissible under the law, was introduced through

the publication of a procurement guidance note in May 2012. Prior to the introduction of the policy there was full consultation with the construction industry and the guidance was presented to the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland.

I make that point to emphasise to the Member that this was not something that was landed on the construction industry without its involvement or without consultation. In fact, we looked at the policy note and the change to policy in direct response to representations made to the Central Procurement Directorate by many in the construction industry. Their concern was that because quality was now integral to bidding for contracts, everyone was doing it so well that it was very hard to distinguish between the quality of one bid and another.

In some instances above a certain threshold — with currency fluctuations, the EU threshold is roughly £4.3 million — bids were allowed on the basis of lowest price. Some in the construction industry, and the majority of people who responded to the consultation, could see the advantages because there was not much difference in the quality of bids. As I outlined, the quality aspects can still be put into contracts at specification stage. We all have a particular interest in ensuring that, although we cannot manipulate or break the rules, small firms have good access to contracts. Some found that this slew of quality measures made it incredibly difficult for small and medium-sized firms to bid for contracts at all.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. He talked a lot about quality, but how is quality measured in a lowest-price contract?

Mr Hamilton: It is useful question to clarify in the context of Mr Milne's question. Just because a tender goes towards being let on lowest price does not mean that we have thrown the idea of having good, high-quality contracts out the window; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Quality is still ensured, but at a different stage when a contract is awarded on the basis of lowest price. Quality is now, and will be, addressed by specifying standards that must be met at various stages throughout the delivery of a contract. It is not a matter of quality being cast aside and abandoned; we still want quality but it will be achieved in a different way. We have several different centres of procurement excellence in Northern Ireland, which will look at the policy and adapt it as they see fit for the contracts that they have.

2.30 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go nuige seo. I thank the Minister for his answers on this topic so far. Will the Minister give us some examples or details of good practice in procurement that has delivered on social clauses?

Mr Hamilton: The Member will be well aware that there is a Programme for Government commitment to include social clauses in all contracts. That has proven challenging. Some contracts, particularly supply contracts, are difficult to let on the basis of including social clauses in the form that we might traditionally have understood them: entailing things like bringing in apprentices or the long-term unemployed. By their very nature, it is less easy to fulfil those types of social clauses in supply contracts

than in construction contracts, which obviously include the possibility of bringing in apprentices and employing some people from the local area who are long-term unemployed.

The process is being shaped. The Member will know that social considerations and clauses have to be incorporated into public procurement processes and contracts, either by linking them to the subject matter of the contract or by using them in contract performance clauses. One school of thought suggests that all contracts have social elements because there are always equality and health and safety considerations and we are increasingly putting prompt payment considerations into contracts. Those factors all have a clear social benefit. However, where possible — in fact, across all contracts — Departments are trying to let contracts that have social clauses. As we develop that policy, we will develop different and broader thinking about what social clauses mean so that we are not pigeonholed into just employing apprentices or the long-term unemployed. We need to look at some other social and community-benefit clauses that we can incorporate into contracts.

Mr Cree: Is the Minister content that work carried out by the bodies working under central procurement — I am thinking about quality and value for money — will allow us to be sure that the contracts will satisfy the Northern Ireland Audit Office or, indeed, any other form of audit?

Mr Hamilton: I am not entirely sure what the Member is getting at. Some would say that we are overly strict in how we administer contracts so that we do not fall foul of any audit, whether from the Northern Ireland Audit Office or anyone else. Obviously, there was a recent Audit Office report on collaborative procurement. The Department welcomes the recommendations in that report and is taking those forward so that, in particular, it can ensure value for money in delivering the softer services that, sometimes, can be more easily procured across Departments.

Budget Exchange Scheme

3. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether unused capital departmental expenditure limit transactions at year end will count towards the Budget exchange scheme carry over. (AQO 4796/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The Budget exchange scheme is an agreement between the devolved Administrations and Her Majesty's Treasury that allows the carry-forward of unspent public expenditure from one year to the next up to a specified limit. At present, these limits allow for the carry-forward of 0.6% of that year's resource departmental expenditure limit (RDEL) and 1.5% of capital departmental expenditure limit (CDEL). In practice, this means that the Northern Ireland Executive can carry approximately £55 million of RDEL and £12 million of CDEL from one year into the next.

This year, however, there is an additional complication in that the devolved Administrations have been allocated additional amounts of financial transactions capital that must be allocated to private sector entities. Because of this complexity, it is more difficult to allocate in year. I am in discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury about the possibility of setting up some form of ring-fenced Budget exchange scheme treatment for this financial transactions

capital that will allow the Executive to fully allocate that spend in Northern Ireland.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. Will the Minister advise what the additional flexibilities that he referred to are? Does he anticipate that all the financial transactions capital funding that has been allocated to the Executive will be spent?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, I have been in discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury on separate Budget exchange scheme arrangements for financial transactions capital. Under those proposed arrangements, we would be able to carry forward a larger proportion of the new financial transactions capital into the first year, with that reducing in the second year.

We have done that so that we can achieve the subject of the second part of the Member's question, which is that we can get it all spent. There is difficulty in getting it all spent: it is about £45 million in the first year, closer to £60 million in the second year, and up to £100 million in the third year, so you can see that the expenditure is ramping up over the next few years. However, because it is new and because it requires us to deal directly with the private sector, it is slightly more complicated for Departments to do that work than it might have been with conventional capital and waiting for £5 million, £10 million or £15 million to come forward conventionally and spending fairly easily. This requires partnership with the private sector.

In response to Ms Bradley's question I mentioned the agrifood loan scheme that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I launched recently, which is a very good example of the use of that financial transactions capital. It is given to the private sector — in this case, directly to the farmers — so that they can develop their business. Other money has already gone to the housing sector to help that ailing sector and allow it to develop. However, it is incumbent on Departments to come forward with new ideas on how they can use this and how they can partner with the private sector and, perhaps, in the process bring forward major infrastructure projects that would otherwise languish and would have to wait several years before they get the money that is so badly needed to get them off the ground.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. This issue will be keenly watched by many in the construction sector. The Minister attended an event with me recently where the construction sector cited concern about party political interventions in some of our major capital projects, such as the peace centre and the A5. Today, the former Finance Minister said that our local construction companies should not build wind turbines, which provide jobs in the local economy. What will the Minister do to prevent further party political interventions in major capital projects that create jobs in the local economy?

Mr Hamilton: It was a fairly major party political intervention from the Member's colleague, the Member for North Belfast Mr Kelly, that did more damage to the peace centre project going forward than anything that anybody else did. Before the Member criticises others, perhaps he should look at the actions of some of his party colleagues in that respect.

What will I do to ensure that infrastructure projects go forward? I will do absolutely everything that I can to

ensure that every pound of capital that we receive — conventional capital, financial transactions capital or as a result of receipts that we get from selling assets that are no longer needed by the Northern Ireland Executive — gets out the door, gets on the ground and gets the infrastructure projects that we need to boost our economy off the ground and, in the short to medium term, provide a boost to employment in a sector that has suffered very badly throughout the downturn, as the Member knows, and continues to suffer very badly. In the next number of weeks, I hope to bring forward not only the October monitoring round paper, which will have a capital element to it, but the reallocation of money from the A5, which cannot move forward at the minute, and some of the additional money that we received from Treasury. Given the Member's obvious support for infrastructure investment, I hope that that bodes well for Executive approval of that paper from members of his party. As a result of that investment, we will see further boosts for the construction sector and further improvements to infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. As the Minister who holds the purse strings of the Assembly — the Boss Cat, so to speak — can he give any advice or instructions to Departments to ensure that capital projects are shovel-ready, to use another Minister's expression, and we do not have the embarrassment of money having to be rolled over or lost?

Mr Hamilton: The reference to 'Boss Cat' shows the Member's age. I almost looked to Mr Weir for TV trivia. It may have been called 'Boss Cat' previously, although, when it came here, it was called 'Top Cat' or something like that. I always remember 'Top Cat'. I am happy to take either as a label.

The term "shovel-ready" is used frequently, and I am not fond of it. Very few projects, if any, would be appropriately deemed "shovel-ready". Suggesting that they are shovel-ready means that they have gone through procurement and are literally ready to go. As the Member will appreciate, once you go past procurement and start letting the contract, you are going ahead with it; you cannot then pause it, because, if you halt the project, it would get you into all sorts of legal issues and problems. A better term would be "procurement-ready". One thing that I am keen to see happen — I look forward to the Member's support for this — is a more strategic look at our infrastructure as a region to ask which projects are the most important projects that we want to take forward and work those up to a particular level. It may require investment by the Executive and individual Departments to get those projects to the stage where they are ready to be procured so that if, as we are talking about, the A5 or other capital projects do not go forward or Treasury gives us more capital spend, which is the likely direction of travel over the next couple of years, we can start to hit buttons on those strategically important schemes and let them go forward. There is a requirement for a degree of prioritisation of our capital projects in a way that we have not done over the past number of years.

Investment: Infrastructure

4. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the economic importance of investing in physical infrastructure, when considering the 2014-15 capital exercise. (AQO 4797/11-15)

14. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the UK Government decision to prioritise capital spend over resource spend in the June spending review statement. (AQO 4807/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: With your permission, Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 4 and 14 together.

Capital investment or investment in our physical infrastructure is of significant economic importance. That type of investment improves the region's infrastructure, generates long-term returns on investment and provides employment opportunities in the short to medium term. With regard to the ongoing capital exercise, the Executive will seek to invest appropriately in infrastructure assets, whilst recognising the importance of other capital spend.

The continued skewing of available resources to the capital budget by Her Majesty's Treasury should be viewed positively. The constrained resource position, whilst providing its own challenges, has the effect of forcing Departments, including my own, to seek further efficiencies and savings. In some ways, the Treasury position is the catalyst for a continued savings agenda that will ensure that government resources are put to optimum use. We, of course, benefit from the additional capital provided by way of the Barnett formula, and we will seek to ensure continued investment in our regional infrastructure.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for that detailed explanation. When will the outcome of the 2014-15 capital exercise be known?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I alluded to that in my response to Mr McKay. This exercise is a result of the failure to proceed with the A5 and some additional capital money that we have received from Treasury as a result of a concerted policy by Treasury to skew from resource expenditure to capital expenditure. That has increased our level of capital expenditure, which gives us the pleasant problem of having more money to spend than we originally thought.

My Department wrote to other Departments over the summer and early autumn asking for bids. Departments and Ministers took that as an opportunity to be cheeky, as they frequently do, and bid for everything and anything, like a kid at Christmas wanting everything off the list. Of course, we will not have enough money to give them everything that they want, but we should be able to give them something of what they want. I hope that we get agreement from the Executive in the coming weeks for not just the 2014-15 capital exercise but also the October monitoring round. That will bring some welcome good news not just to the Northern Ireland economy but to the construction sector, which has suffered badly over the past number of years.

Ms Brown: I, too, thank the Minister for his answers. How does the 2015-16 capital settlement compare with the 2014-15 position on capital?

Mr Hamilton: I thank her for that question. It compares very favourably. It is not as high as it was at the start of the

downturn and when that started to hit public spending in Northern Ireland badly. Members will remember that we were taking a 40% reduction in capital expenditure in this current Budget period. That came at a time when private sector investment in infrastructure collapsed completely. Public spend on capital now accounts for close to 70% of all capital expenditure in Northern Ireland, which shows the extent to which private house building and commercial property development in particular have collapsed in Northern Ireland.

The Member asked for the comparative position. For 2015-16, capital available to the Northern Ireland Executive will increase to £1.1 billion. That is an increase of 3.3% on our latest 2014-15 position. Significantly, it will be 31.9% higher than the 2014-15 position that was planned for originally in the Budget 2011-15. The Executive have the discretion to increase that through capital asset sales and other mechanisms. It is, certainly, better news. It is not as good as we would have liked, but it is better news for the next budget year and 2015-16 than it was heading into the current Budget.

2.45 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Investment Conference

1. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she agrees that last Friday's Northern Ireland Investment Conference was an excellent showcase event, superbly organised by Invest Northern Ireland. (AQT 231/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): This could be a very short answer.

Mr Allister: It is a tough question.

Mrs Foster: It is a pretty tough question. I am sure that it will be followed up by an equally tough question from Mr Allister later.

I was extremely proud of the way in which the investment conference was planned and executed. I was very proud of the fact that we had 121 international companies at the investment conference with 55 potential new investors. Instead of the selling being carried out by Ministers and Invest Northern Ireland — of course, we were doing that in any event — the main piece of the conference was really hearing from investors who are already in Northern Ireland and felt so strongly about their investment and the experience that they have had here that they wanted to advocate on behalf of Northern Ireland as a place to do business. I think that it was a tremendous success. We look forward to the tangible benefits of the investment conference rolling out over the next six to 18 months.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for that very responsive answer. She mentioned six to 18 months. Does she have any idea what sort of investment will come back at this stage? Are there indications that people are genuinely interested in investing in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: The investment conference was a great catalyst for moving potential investors along that decision-making route. Some people at the conference were visiting

Northern Ireland for the very first time. Some people had already made visits here and were close to making a decision. Because of that, very soon, investment decisions will be made about Northern Ireland as a place to do business. Others will maybe follow through at a later stage. I would think that, within the next six months, we will see a tangible benefit. That is a change, if I may say so, from the previous investment conference that was held in Northern Ireland, which I attended as the then Environment Minister, in May 2008. At that stage, we were saying that, to look forward, we would need to assess what was happening in 18 months' time. I think that the fact that we had potential investors there — some of whom were further along the road than others — means that we will see tangible benefits in the next six months.

Broadband

2. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to update the House on where the Department stands with the broadband development fund (BD UK) rollout that the Government announced in September last year, given the issues with rural broadband and the fact that broadband is not yet available to 10% of Northern Ireland. (AQT 232/11-15)

I was careful not to go into the area of the question for oral answer.

Mrs Foster: The Member can get a more detailed answer to his question because question 4, which I think that he was probably referring to, has been withdrawn by Mr McCrea. I can, therefore, go into more detail for the Member.

We are moving ahead with the BDUK money. We have been carrying out consultations on what we need to do in Northern Ireland. That has been held back somewhat by the European Union with regard to state aid rules. Because of that, we had to carry out further consultation. We have received responses to that further consultation from 156 individuals and 13 organisations highlighting nearly 700 postcodes where it is felt that broadband is not available. We are taking all of those into consideration. We hope to move forward on the matter very soon.

Mr Craig: In my mind, it does not really matter who wins the tender for the roll-out of the project as long as they deliver. I admit to being one of those without broadband. Will areas where there is a large concentration of housing without broadband, such as my area, where over 150 houses are affected, be given priority by whomever wins the tender for the scheme? Will the Minister give a commitment that this will not undermine any of the previous schemes that her Department has rolled out in rural areas?

Mrs Foster: As the Member will know, we very much want to avoid having any duplication at all. So, on his latter question, this is very much about adding value to what is in place and reaching harder-to-reach areas, particularly rural areas. I take his point that some areas that he may not consider rural in a Northern Ireland sense still suffer from not having access to broadband. He will be pleased to know that the Annahilt postcodes, which he and, indeed, his colleagues have raised with me on a number of occasions, will be included in the intervention area as we move forward. The Member said that he does not mind who wins the tender as long as this is delivered, and that is certainly the Department's position as well.

Jobs

3. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for further information on the substantial work of Invest NI on setting more challenging targets to move from jobs promoted to jobs created, and when that work might be completed. (AQT 233/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This issue has come before the House on many occasions, so much so that, when we launched the jobs fund, which was set up to try to quickly bring about jobs with some of our more indigenous firms, it had that jobs created target. It has been a transition piece in respect of other selective financial assistance. As I said previously, I hope that that will come forward in the very near future.

Invest Northern Ireland's target is to create 4,000 jobs through the jobs fund in the 2011-15 period. A total of 3,306 jobs have already been created through the jobs fund, so I think that we will see it go way beyond its target. I have certainly said to the chief executive and to Invest Northern Ireland that I expect it to go way beyond its target, because I really believe that the jobs fund, in a very small way sometimes, makes an absolutely fundamental difference to the jobs available right across Northern Ireland.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, will those definitions have read-across to EU funding in particular, and will they be adopted by DARD in its assessment of projects applying for rural development funding?

Mrs Foster: I cannot speak for the Agriculture Minister. I know that there is a consultation on the rural development programme at the moment. I very much hope that job creation is one of the elements that she will look at in her rural development programme, because it would really add value to the rural setting in Northern Ireland if we could look at jobs created as well. I have asked InterTradeIreland, for example, to look at jobs created on a North/South basis through its programmes. Of course, InterTradeIreland is not a job creation agency; it is a trade agency. Yet, I have asked it to look at how many jobs it has created through its interventions. It is a very good mechanism to have. Sometimes, it is not the primary reason where we intervene, but it is good to know the number of jobs that have been created.

Exploris

4. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what personal engagement she has had with the Minister of the Environment and Ards Borough Council, given that in her recent correspondence to my colleague Chris Hazzard, she acknowledged that the Tourist Board recognised Exploris as a major, major tourist attraction and that she has spoken of the need for Ards Borough Council to find a sustainable solution for the project. (AQT 234/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. Indeed, I did say that about Exploris in my answer to her colleague, and, therefore, I am sure that she will be a little surprised to hear that I have not had any correspondence from Ards council about the issue. I might not have said "major, major", but I believe that Exploris provides a tourism offering, particularly in Portaferry, which is quite remote and perhaps not as easy to access as some other areas.

Therefore, the situation will have a huge impact on it. The solution is to look to all sources of funding, whether they are public or private. I understand that my colleague the Minister of the Environment will bring an Executive paper, which, unfortunately, I have not had sight of yet. However, we wait to see his Executive paper.

Ms Ruane: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that answer. I am a bit surprised that there were not more meetings. However, there is still time for that to happen. Does the Minister believe that, if the project is such an important project, which I believe it is, only £1.8 million of support from the NITB over the past 26 years seems a very small amount of money, given that period? Will she redouble her efforts to find a solution that her Department is part of?

Mrs Foster: I am of course happy to work with Executive colleagues to be a part of the solution. I do not accept what she says about the £1.8 million; a lot of facilities across Northern Ireland would be very content to have £1.8 million of Northern Ireland Tourist Board funding. In fact, I can think of a few off the top of my head in my constituency that would be happy to have that sort of funding. I will work with ministerial colleagues, and I look forward to the receipt of the Executive paper. However, I will make the point that I think that it is about looking at a holistic answer to the problem. It is a problem, and we have to look everywhere to find solutions. It is not just a question of coming to central government with the hand out. I am sure that she is not suggesting that, and I do not think that that is what Exploris is doing. I have had some very interesting conversations about alternative answers to what is happening in Exploris, and I look forward to continuing those discussions.

Saint Patrick's Trail

5. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what she is doing to further promote the Saint Patrick Centre and the Saint Patrick's Trail. (AQT 235/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for that question. The Member and, indeed, the Member of Parliament for the area raise that question with me quite frequently. We have a designated officer in the Tourist Board to work with and promote the Saint Patrick's Trail. I happen to think that we could do more to promote the Saint Patrick's Trail, because it is a tremendous asset. It is one of those assets that I do not believe people are aware of, and it comes back to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland to promote it. For example, if people come across in their own car, there is a great opportunity for them to travel from Armagh right the way round to Downpatrick and further to see the birthplace and to celebrate the Christian heritage that we have in Northern Ireland. So, I am very content to say to the Member that we will work with him and his colleagues in the two constituencies at least that are concerned. I say "at least", because I know that North Down has a very keen interest in St Patrick as well.

Mr Dunne: Hear, hear.

Mrs Foster: I did not forget you, Gordon.

Mr Rogers: Thanks, Minister, for your response. Will more funds be made available, particularly for marketing the product?

Mrs Foster: We will continue to work with the Saint Patrick's Trail. When I look at marketing across Northern Ireland and where we are using it internationally, I look to see that it has a geographical spread. That is important, because tourism is a product that goes right across Northern Ireland. That should be reflected in all our marketing produce. I am content that that is the case, but, as I said, we are happy to work with colleagues in all the constituencies concerned to make sure that that is the case going forward.

Visa Applications

6. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her views on the possible investment impact of Chancellor George Osborne's announcement that visa applications for Chinese visitors to the United Kingdom are to be relaxed. (AQT 236/11-15)

Mrs Foster: We in Northern Ireland very much welcome the announcement, particularly from a tourism standpoint. We believe that it will increase the number of tourists that will come to the wider UK but also to Northern Ireland. We are building up a firm relationship with our colleagues in China, and the arrangement that the Chancellor announced yesterday will be a positive one for Northern Ireland. We will certainly use it to our advantage from a tourism perspective and from a business perspective.

3.00 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is time up for topical questions. I am sorry that we did not have the chance for a supplementary.

We move on to questions for oral answer, and I call Ms Caitríona Ruane. Sorry, that question has been withdrawn. I will bring Members up to date: questions 1, 4, 8 and 9 have been withdrawn. Question 1 has been transferred to DFP for a written response.

Giro d'Italia

2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to invest in tourism promotion in relation to potential visitors ahead of the Giro d'Italia 2014 event. (AQO 4810/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I travelled to Milan last week to attend the official media launch of the 2014 Giro d'Italia, where I had the opportunity to meet many sporting journalists as well as those from the travel and trade media. There is enormous prestige for Northern Ireland in being selected as the start venue for the event, and our promotion of it is already under way. During the 2013 event, Tourism Ireland put in place a busy programme of promotions to capitalise on the tourism potential for Northern Ireland, with a presence throughout the entire race, distributing brochures and information about holidaying in Northern Ireland. It also hosted a press briefing at the end of the Giro 2013 for 100 key sports and lifestyle journalists from Italy and elsewhere around the globe. Promotion will continue up to and during the event through Tourism Ireland and Northern Ireland Tourist Board promotional campaigns.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her answer, and I share her delight in the announcement of the routes for the Giro d'Italia. I am delighted that it will pass through my East Belfast constituency. I have cycled the route, and it takes in

some amazing locations. Therefore, congratulations to the Department on its work to secure the Giro for that route.

How does the Minister intend to engage with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and cycling companies to ensure that they can maximise their involvement and benefit from this truly international event?

Mrs Foster: That is a good question, because one of the things that we developed before the G8 conference was to have the Tourist Board and Invest Northern Ireland work more holistically. That was the first time that they had joint campaigns and joint marketing. I very much hope that that will be the case for the Giro d'Italia as well.

I met the British consul general while I was in Milan. He is keen to make sure that we bring some Northern Ireland firms to Milan, and I would like to bring some Italian firms here as well. Obviously, we have some very good cycling SMEs and not so SMEs — the Member will know that some of our firms are globally recognised in the field. There is a great opportunity not just from a tourism perspective, which I celebrate, but from a business perspective.

Mr Storey: I concur with the congratulations. Well done to the Minister for all the work that has been done on this. I welcome the fact that the event will pass through Ballymoney and places such as Ballybogy, which will put them on the map and the world stage.

Will the Minister explain or expand on the work that her Department, along with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and local councils, will do to promote these events so that, as we did with the Olympic torch, we maximise every possible organisation to ensure that Northern Ireland is highlighted in the best possible way, particularly my North Antrim constituency?

Mrs Foster: We will be working in partnership, as we did for the G8. The fact that we worked so closely with Fermanagh District Council during that event is a good template. The Irish Open is also a good template for working with councils and other Departments. That is what we will continue to do. I am sure that the Italians in particular are looking forward to Ballybogy in your constituency, but we look forward to selling Northern Ireland on the world stage. When I visited Milan and was part of the announcement last week, I was proud of the excitement from all the journalists over the fact that the Giro is coming to Northern Ireland. We, along with the councils and agencies, look forward to the event and the build-up to it. I am sure that we will be able to maximise the fact that this huge event is coming to Northern Ireland.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far, although I am obviously disappointed that it is not coming to the Mourne. I invite the Minister or her officials to come to the Mourne Etape on 27 October. Does she have any plans to encourage other grand tours such as the Tour of Spain or the Tour de France to come to this part of the world?

Mrs Foster: The Tour de France is going to Yorkshire next year, but we are first: we are in May, and I take great delight in that. I hope that when — I say "when" — we make the event the success that it will be, we will then attract other major events. I make no secret of the fact that I hope that the Tour de France will come to Northern

Ireland in the near future when they see how well we are able to host the Giro d'Italia.

As the Member will know — I have answered his previous topical question on the Mountains of Mourne, a place I love well — I had no input into the choice of route. That is something that some people got a little excited about, but they should not have. The route was picked by the professionals, the people who were planning the route. They had stringent reasons for picking particular routes because of time trials and what have you, and therefore we had no impact at all on where the routes should go. I wanted to put that on record today, because, otherwise, let us be honest, it would have been coming to County Fermanagh.

Mrs Overend: The Giro d'Italia is a hugely significant event for Northern Ireland, and I commend the Minister and her Executive colleagues for bringing it here. I could mention our Minister, Danny Kennedy, for his part in that as well.

I thank the Minister for her responses to the questions so far. I hope that SMEs from my constituency of Mid Ulster continue to be involved in the event as they were in the original launch. Can the Minister confirm that the suspension of the race director following alleged financial irregularities will not affect the hosting of the event in Northern Ireland next year?

Mrs Foster: I welcome the Member's comments about the Regional Development Minister, because, when I say that I am working with councils and other government agencies, I mean Roads Service as well. It will have a key role to play in this as it did with the Irish Open. It will, of course, have more of a role in this event because it will take place on our public roads and we need the cooperation of Roads Service.

The suspension was of the CEO of the entire RCS Sport organisation, of which the Giro is only part. When I heard the news on Thursday before the launch, I immediately made contact with RCS Sport and spoke to the interim CEO. He assured me that the Giro is over 100 years old; that the suspension had had no impact on another sporting event; that it would have no impact on the Giro d'Italia; and that it will proceed without any issues. I was concerned because public money has been invested in the Giro d'Italia and I wanted to ensure that our funding was secure. I can give the Member the assurance that our money is secure.

Fiscal Devolution

3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the recent report published by NICVA, which presents an economic case for further fiscal devolution, in the context of her Department's economic strategy. (AQO 4811/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recently received a copy of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action's report and will meet its representatives to discuss this and other recent NICVA research reports related to the economy on 5 November. As outlined in 'Building a Prosperous and United Community', the UK Government have committed to making a final decision on the devolution of corporation tax to Northern Ireland no later than the autumn statement in 2014. Work is ongoing between the Executive and the UK Government to examine the potential to devolve specific

additional fiscal powers. Recommendations for further devolution will be put to the Executive and Government Ministers by autumn 2014.

Mr F McCann: The Minister has answered the supplementary question that I was going to ask.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith.

Has the Minister or her Department done any assessment of the report presented by NICVA on the implications of welfare reform, which stated that it had the potential to withdraw £750 million of expenditure from the local economy?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Chair for his question. As I indicated to the Member who asked the previous question, I will meet NICVA not just about the fiscal powers report but its other recent reports. I look forward to that engagement on 5 November.

Mr Dunne: Can the Minister give us a further update on the devolving of corporation tax powers and perhaps the timescale for that?

Mrs Foster: As Members will know, the Executive continue to press for the power to set a lower rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. Indeed, when the Prime Minister was here last Friday, he referred to corporation tax from the stage of the Titanic centre. The case is very strong; its merits have been set out in a range of research that is already in the public domain. I remain disappointed that the Prime Minister has delayed his decision until autumn next year, but there it is. It is delayed until after the Scottish referendum. We remain committed to working with Treasury officials in particular in the run-up to that because, of course, a lot of work needs to be carried out before any decision is made in the autumn of next year.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister expand on the specific fiscal powers that she mentioned? What are the details of those?

Mrs Foster: NICVA talks about a range of fiscal powers. For our part, the Treasury stated in the economic pact paper that it would explore other tax options that would aid us in our long-term goal of rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy, including such things as R&D tax credits, an enhanced annual investment allowance, training credits and national insurance holidays. However, we should sound a note of caution: those options will have associated difficulties, not least state aid issues. Of course, they will have to be paid for as well. Those are the sorts of things that are being looked at by Her Majesty's Treasury in the economic pact paper.

Hydraulic Fracturing

5. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the potential granting of licences for hydraulic fracturing. (AQO 4813/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI grants petroleum licences for the exploration, appraisal and production of oil and gas. My Department does not grant licences for hydraulic fracturing. Hydraulic fracturing is a specialised engineering process associated with some types of drilling operations that require permission from a number of authorities, including my Department. As yet, no applications have

been received for drilling or hydraulic fracturing in Fermanagh.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Will she give us a brief outline of the processes required to grant a licence for hydraulic fracturing or the process that she has just outlined? Is the landowner's consent required, or can the land be vested?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. I understand that Greenpeace released a statement yesterday about landowners and their legal powers. In Northern Ireland, holders of petroleum licences — if the Member is talking about Fermanagh, that would be Tamboran — need to obtain the permission of the landowners beneath whose land they wish to drill. The landowner's permission is asked for, and, if it is granted, that can take place. That permission is required for drilling for deep geothermal energy, energy storage, carbon storage projects and hydraulic fracturing. Of course, the way in which hydraulic fracturing takes place means that it is not just straight down; it spreads out further. However, the companies still need the permission of Northern Ireland landowners before that can take place.

As I understand it, the company in County Fermanagh expects to apply to drill a deep borehole to retrieve rock core from the Bundoran shale for analysis. It has not yet applied to the Department to drill that hole. It wants to take out some of the shale to look at it, but, as yet, that application has not been made. That is the present situation.

Mr G Robinson: Shale gas in other regions of the world is bringing down energy costs to businesses. Does that threaten businesses in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: My Assembly Private Secretary has just come back from America with some of his colleagues. They were there on a young leadership course, and they looked at hydraulic fracturing across the US.

The US has managed to bring down the price of energy quite dramatically because of shale gas. It is now able to bring manufacturing back from China and other places across the world, and, undoubtedly, we need to take note of that.

3.15 pm

I listened to the Environment Minister yesterday during his Question Time, where he said that the application would not happen on his watch. I think that that was the phrase that he used. I think that he needs to reflect on the fact that this is a novel and controversial issue, and I recognise it as such. Therefore, it will be taken to the Executive and will be a matter for the Executive as a whole to decide on. It will not just be from my part but from his part. Indeed, every other Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive will have to take this matter to the Executive for a decision. I have known that for some considerable time, but it has been really underlined for me by the judgement of Mr Justice Treacy last Friday, where he said that these issues need to be taken to the Executive. Therefore, the decision on hydraulic fracturing, no matter what each individual Minister may feel about the process, needs to be taken by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Mr McKinney: The Minister has touched on the concerns, which, of course, include environmental concerns. What

recent discussions has she had with the Irish Government about the independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) engaging scientific research into the potential environmental impacts of such exploration?

Mrs Foster: I very much look forward to the piece of work that the Republic of Ireland's EPA has carried out. I refer the Member and, indeed, the whole House to a very important piece of scientific evidence that came forward from the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering in the UK. I think that everybody should read that. It makes me reflect on the event that I attended very early this morning in relation to pairing up scientists with MLAs so that people would be in full possession of scientific information. I think that it is very important that, when we make decisions, we have all of the science in front of us. That document is very balanced. It looks at shale gas extraction in the UK and does a whole review of hydraulic fracturing. That is something that Members might not enjoy but will benefit from reading. I hope that Members take the opportunity to have a look at it.

Life Sciences

6. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the importance of the life sciences sector to the growth of the economy. (AQO 4814/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Executive economic strategy identified life and health sciences as a priority area. From 2009 to 2012, business sales have grown from £475 million to £680 million, and employment has risen from 4,250 people to 5,580 people. Invest Northern Ireland has offered support of £44 million, with the main focus on improving company R&D capability. In response to the Executive's economy and jobs initiative, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety established a group to assess the potential opportunities for employment and business development from the healthcare sector. The group recommended the development of a life and health sciences strategy, and this work is now being taken forward.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for her response. Minister, you will, of course, be very aware of the cutting edge work in life sciences that is being done in my constituency by Almac. What are your thoughts on the potential of Almac Discovery's recent investment of £13 million into recent research and development projects?

Mrs Foster: Almac continues to give us good news stories here in Northern Ireland, and I know that it is very firmly rooted in his constituency and does a tremendous job. It now employs 1,600 staff locally and pays over £49 million annually in salaries, so it is a very significant player not only in the mid-Ulster area but right across Northern Ireland.

In total, Invest NI has offered £13.4 million to Almac in the past three years, and most of that has been in research and development. That is a very good and, if I may use the pun, healthy sign for the company because it is investing so much in research and development. It is looking to the future and investing it here in Northern Ireland, and, for me, that shows a vote of confidence in the skills of our people here in Northern Ireland and the ability to develop the products that it so heavily relies on.

Employment

7. Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the steps taken to develop an island-wide employment and growth strategy. (AQO 4815/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As noted in my previous responses to your party colleagues, my Department works with agencies in the Republic of Ireland where it is beneficial to the Northern Ireland economy. The economies in both jurisdictions face very different challenges. The Irish economy has almost double our unemployment rate, operates in the euro zone and is subject to a severe fiscal regime imposed by the bailout from the European Union. I therefore have no plans to develop an all-Ireland strategy, but I remain committed to delivering actions detailed within our own Northern Ireland economic strategy and the more recent economy and jobs initiative. I believe that implementation of those activities will deliver growth, prosperity and jobs and will rebalance the local economy in the longer term.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that response. Given that there is a range of Europe-wide initiatives, for example, to tackle unemployment among young people, and, obviously, there are different arrangements, fiscal and otherwise, in both the jurisdictions on this island, can the Minister not see the sense, or does she not understand, that it is important to work with our colleagues and counterparts in the Irish Government to tackle issues on a cross-border and all-island basis? Obviously, there are some differences, but there are also a lot of similarities, not least the fact that the young people across this island are finding it increasingly difficult to get jobs.

Mrs Foster: I do not accept that they are finding it increasingly difficult to get jobs. In fact, our unemployment statistics have continued to fall over the past seven months, so it is not true that they are finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs. I want to say to the Member — and I said it in my answer — that I have no difficulty working and, in fact, will proactively work with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland if it is to the benefit of Northern Ireland. I am the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for Northern Ireland. Therefore, that has to always be my primary reason to do anything, and that will continue to be the way I will do it.

I will work with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland and, of course, with colleagues in the Westminster Government. We were pleased to have the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable, visit us about two weeks ago. We had some very good discussions, particularly in relation to access to finance for Northern Ireland companies, because that remains an issue for a lot of our companies, as I am sure he appreciates. We wanted to know — I think I heard Minister Simon Hamilton refer to this — how we can make those national schemes more applicable to Northern Ireland. We will do that through the work of the joint ministerial task force.

Mr Douglas: Can the Minister remind us what the current level of unemployment is in Northern Ireland and how that compares with unemployment levels in the Republic of Ireland?

Mrs Foster: That was one of the points that I was trying to make. Of course there are still challenges in our economy, and I do not take away from that. In fact, even when I was commenting on the huge success that was the investment conference last week, I said that we still needed to have cognisance of those people who struggle to find a job. I do not accept that it is an increasing struggle, but I do think that there are still those who are in difficulty.

The unemployment rate for Northern Ireland is 6.9%, and the Republic of Ireland's current rate of unemployment is 13.7%. I think we need to bear in mind that we have difficulties here in Northern Ireland that we have to deal with. We will seek help from wherever we can get it, but we need to concentrate on the people of Northern Ireland, because that is who we are elected to represent.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. Following on from the information that the Minister has provided to the House, will she acknowledge that, in the north-west area and in my constituency, where the recent figures show that unemployment is at 9%, a much more targeted resource should be placed in that area to ensure that our young people have a better future?

Mrs Foster: I am working with the Minister for Employment and Learning on a strategy at present, which we hope to bring to the Assembly very soon. It is something that we discussed at the last economic subgroup on the economy, because we realise that, despite the fact that our unemployment figures — I accept what he says about his own constituency, but from a Northern Ireland perspective — are at 6.9%, there is a high level of economic inactivity that we really need to grapple with. We are high above the rest of the United Kingdom and need to drill down as to why that is the case. We have been doing a lot of work on that issue, and, as I say, I think that the Minister for Employment and Learning will be bringing that paper to the Executive in the very near future.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister agree that, for the purpose of best serving the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, her focus needs to remain on keeping up with and being part of the signs of a beginning of a resurgence in the much larger United Kingdom economy? Does she agree that one of the tasks is to make sure that we do not fall behind that and get diverted into chasing the moonbeams that Mr Maskey referred to, but rather keep focused on building within that large, world economy that is the United Kingdom?

Mrs Foster: I entirely agree with the Member. Of course, when our Chancellor of the Exchequer is in China talking about the United Kingdom economy, he is talking about Northern Ireland as well as the rest of the UK. That gives us the opportunity to go to China and talk about issues from a UK perspective, because the United Kingdom has such a global footprint.

Often, when I travel to foreign countries, I use the good offices of the British ambassador and British consul general. I use them to good effect. Since the Prime Minister came to office, he has decided very clearly that, instead of a diplomatic role being the lead role for those offices, really, it should be an economic and trade role. We welcome that, because that means that, when we visit those countries, they are more focused on helping us to find new and inward investment for Northern Ireland. So, I absolutely agree. One of the strongest reasons for being

in the United Kingdom is an economic reason. I make no apologies for that. That is where we are better off.

Creative Industries

10. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the value provided to the economy by the creative industries. (AQO 4818/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Invest Northern Ireland, is specifically focused on supporting the development of television and film production, digital media and music, as it is those sub-sectors of the creative industries that offer the greatest potential return for our economy in employment and exports. Since 2007, over 450 new jobs have been created in businesses operating in the television, film and digital sectors. In addition, Invest Northern Ireland supported Northern Ireland Screen during that period, which has helped to leverage over £96 million of direct spend in the Northern Ireland economy on such things as wages and salaries, set production, hotel accommodation and transport costs. In short, that secured a direct spend of over £4 for every £1 invested.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for that answer and, effectively, for answering my supplementary question. I am sure that she would agree that the return of 4:1 on investment by Northern Ireland Screen is to be commended. Does she agree that there is almost unlimited potential in that area for further investment, which should be actively encouraged?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. One of the most powerful testimonies at last Friday's investment conference was by Jay Roewe from HBO. He said that Northern Ireland was the best place to shoot — I think that he meant to shoot a film. It was a very powerful testament as to why people should look at Northern Ireland as a place for the creative industries, digital jobs and production jobs. We are continuing to see companies come to Northern Ireland to make television and film, most notably, at present, 'Dracula', from Universal Studios. Quite a few other television productions are going on as well.

Mr D McIlveen: The Minister will be aware that 'Game of Thrones' brought a lot of fame to Northern Ireland. Has she identified whether any tourist opportunities came from the decision to shoot 'Game of Thrones' here?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. I had not realised how internationally thought of 'Game of Thrones' was until I was in Brazil talking about tourism opportunities and mentioned the fact that, in June, the Tourist Board, along with Northern Ireland Screen, was bringing the 'Game of Thrones' exhibition to Belfast. All of a sudden, everybody lit up, because they were all very much aware of 'Game of Thrones' on HBO. That exhibition took place in June. We are also developing a tourism trail for 'Game of Thrones' so that people can see where it is all filmed.

As well as 'Game of Thrones', there are many other sets across Northern Ireland that can benefit from tourists. I am thinking particularly, as you would expect me to, of 'Blandings', which is filmed in Crom Castle in County Fermanagh. It has been referred to as Northern Ireland's Highclere, which is the set of 'Downton Abbey'. So, we are very pleased that there are all those tourism opportunities as well as business opportunities from the creative industries.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends Question Time. I ask the House to take its ease for a few moments while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

National Crime Agency

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes have been added to the total time. 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 who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Before we begin, the House should note that, if amendment No 1 is made, amendment No 2 cannot be made, as the wording will have changed to such an extent that it would not be in order to put the Question on it.

Mr D McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's ability to protect life under article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and to tackle serious crime, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking; and will work to ensure that no further delays are allowed to impact on the work of the NCA being extended to Northern Ireland.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. Unlike some others, we are not in the business of bringing issues to the House just for the sake of it when no new information has been brought to light. Therefore, when we received the notification from the Chief Constable in his governance statement, we felt that it was necessary to bring the motion to the House. I appreciate the Business Office making time and facilitating us being able to do so.

I want to deal first with the amendments and speak on our feelings about those. We oppose amendment No 1, which was tabled in the names of Mrs Kelly, Mr Maginness, Mr Attwood and Mr McGlone. I have three simple reasons for that, and most have been rehearsed before around this issue. First, Keith Bristow, who is head of the National Crime Agency, has offered on several occasions to meet regularly with the Northern Ireland Policing Board to update it on the work that the National Crime Agency is involved in in Northern Ireland. That is a special condition that will not be afforded to other devolved parts of the United Kingdom. Therefore, we are receiving special treatment in that case.

Secondly, the National Crime Agency is no less accountable than its predecessor, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). Given that the National Crime Agency is being brought in to replace SOCA, and SOCA was no less accountable, it would, therefore, be illogical to suggest that the replacement body would have to be any more accountable than its predecessor was.

Thirdly, and probably most significantly, the National Crime Agency will be used only in circumstances in which

the Chief Constable feels that it is necessary. Therefore, if the Chief Constable, who works under the Northern Ireland Policing Board's accountability structures, uses his discretion in bringing the National Crime Agency on board and, for whatever reason, that is found to be an incorrect decision, he can be fully held to account. So, I do not feel that amendment No 1 brings any added benefit to the issues that we have to address.

I am certainly in favour of accepting amendment No 2, which was tabled on behalf of Mr Elliott and Mr Hussey. I am tempted to go party political on this, and maybe I will for just a minute, if you do not mind. Bearing in mind that one of the best police forces in the world, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, had excellent powers of intelligence and was very well known for its ability to infiltrate organised crime in the very darkest days of our Province, it is surprising that the unionist party that was largely responsible for its dismantlement tabled this amendment. However, I will take it in the spirit in which it was tabled. Therefore, we are certainly minded to accept amendment No 2.

I express my deep appreciation for the work that SOCA has done in an effort to deal with those who, for some reason that I suspect is unknown to most of us in the House, seem to get a perverted form of satisfaction from the criminal activity in which they are involved. I believe that the commitment and dedication shown by the men and women of SOCA deserve the highest possible commendation. I hope sincerely that the House's failure to agree the National Crime Agency as a replacement for SOCA has in no way sent out a signal that its work was not appreciated. I put on record my personal appreciation for the work that that branch did on drug dealing, human trafficking and other forms of organised criminality, and I hope that everybody in the House will do likewise.

Every member of our community owes a great debt of gratitude to those who serve for our protection; that is their ultimate objective. As time has moved on, so, it seems, has criminals' ability to be one step ahead of the law at times. It is paramount that every possible resource that the PSNI can have at its disposal is made available so that it can be one step ahead of the criminals who are involved in this activity.

Every one of the constituents whom we represent has the right to expect their representatives to support the work of an agency that is committed to confronting some of the most ruthless and evil-minded individuals that we have in the Province. Those men and women are the masterminds behind the distribution of drugs to the youth of our country, and they contribute to fear and attacks and deaths, some of which we have seen in our Province in recent days. They are men and women who are the architects of a human-trafficking network that has entangled many innocent victims in a life that can be characterised only as the darkest form of degradation. They are men and women who abuse their skills in the field of cyber technology to cast a dark shadow of fear across a wide section of our population.

The National Crime Agency has been designed and set up to target and infiltrate those people and to assist the police in our local communities in taking them off the streets. Therefore, I believe that it is regrettable and, in some cases, deplorable that agreement was not found to bring that agency into the Province as of 7 October, when it came into the rest of the United Kingdom. I think

that we have to ask about the motivation behind that. The bottom line is that there is no difference, in practical terms, between the National Crime Agency and its predecessor, SOCA.

We have been given special circumstances by the head of the National Crime Agency that will mean that the Policing Board is fully informed of the activities in which the NCA is involved. What has that done in reality? Let me ask this question: is any agency involved in national security going to step back and allow criminality that will most likely affect other parts of the United Kingdom to take place in Northern Ireland?

It is well known that, regardless of whether the legislation is in place, the National Crime Agency will still work with the PSNI on the sharing of information. How is that more accountable than what was put in front of the Policing Board and the Executive to move forward the issue? At the Policing Board's last meeting, and this is most significant, when questioned about his comments, the Chief Constable made it very clear that the key power that is being taken away from the PSNI in fighting crime is the ability to seize assets.

I wonder what the motivation is of those who oppose the formation of the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland. What is the attraction for those people in a situation whereby the PSNI no longer has the power to seize the assets of criminals, particularly in parts of south Armagh, where it is well known that serious amounts of assets have been seized? What is their true motivation? We really need to get to the bottom of that. There is very little that we can see around what the National Crime Agency is going to be doing in this country. Very little has been diminished for those who are opposing its establishment. The only thing that has been taken away is the ability of the PSNI to seize assets, because there is no legislation for it to do so.

Therefore, we have to be very serious about what the Chief Constable said. He has made it clear that his ability to protect life has now been undermined by the decision of some in the House who are not prepared to allow the National Crime Agency to operate to its full extent in Northern Ireland.

I want to know why that is, and I look forward to hearing an explanation from those who will be speaking.

Mrs D Kelly: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:

"notes the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's relationship with some other serious and organised crime agencies; further notes the statement made on behalf of the PSNI at the launch of the Policing Board annual report in January 2013 that the NCA must operate in an accountable manner through the Policing Board; regrets that the Home Secretary has failed to bring forward proposals that would allow the NCA to operate as such and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Home Secretary to urgently introduce statutory amendments that would guarantee that the NCA and its operations in Northern Ireland are fully accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board."

The SDLP has always been straight on policing. It has always held firm to the principles of the Patten report, accountability and oversight. We stood against many other parties, opposite and to my right, to draw down and settle for the right set of circumstances for Patten. We have not set our face against having a National Crime Agency per se. The Minister knows that we are working with his Department and are seeking a meeting with the Home Secretary about our concerns. Our concerns are the concerns of many, and not just those of some of the broader criminal justice family, such as the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), which has said that the proposals for the National Crime Agency:

"in effect insert another police service into Northern Ireland, accountable to the Home Secretary and largely outside of the reach of the local accountability structures committed to following the Patten Report, in particular the Policing Board."

We have a bottom line, and it is that the NCA must be accountable to the Policing Board. Nothing less will allay the concerns of the SDLP.

We know the pain —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will in a moment, but there are a couple of points that I want to make first.

There are three key principles that I think are largely shared across the PSNI and many other bodies that want to ensure that there is fully accountable policing. We do not want the Chief Constable to be accompanied to a meeting of the Policing Board by the NCA director to give his report. We want the Chief Constable to have full visibility over all NCA operations. We want him to have the power of veto, and we want to have vicarious accountability through the mechanisms of the Policing Board.

I give way to Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: The Member talks about a bottom line. Is the bottom line not that the SDLP has to make up its mind whether it is going to dance on the head of a pin about accountability and find that more significant than holding criminals to account? The consequence of the SDLP's action is to let criminals off the hook and to let them keep their assets. Lay aside the platitudes. Is now not the moment for reality? Is it not time that the SDLP got itself off this hook and came down firmly on the side of dealing with criminals and their assets, rather than this make-believe about accountability?

3.45 pm

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Allister and, indeed, Mr McIlveen, are out of step with international thinking. There is a debate raging in the USA and in the UK following the release of the Snowden files and that level of discovery. Hillary Clinton and, indeed, Yvette Cooper, the shadow Home Secretary, have admitted that the scrutiny and accountability mechanisms for intelligence and security services in the USA and in the UK are not keeping pace with the technologies now employed by agencies.

To protect citizens' rights, there is a clear need for accountability mechanisms to keep pace with developments elsewhere. Nowhere is that more important than here in the North of Ireland, where, as we all know,

things went wrong in the past and agents ran amok, and where, indeed, people have been returned to jail without having been presented with the evidence against them. I have a constituent who has been denied a parole hearing. Mr Martin Corey has been returned to jail on the basis of intelligence advice, but that has not been provided to him or his legal representatives.

We do not stand for that type of policing. The SDLP took a lot of the hard hits and the hard decisions when others were standing outside the tent, shouting and screaming. The SDLP made the right call over those years and will continue to make the right call on the NCA.

My colleague Mark Durkan put it very succinctly when he used this analogy in a debate in Westminster. He said:

"There is no point in us saying 'Yes, we've sorted out full accountable policing and none of the old things can happen,' only for people to find all sorts of other things going on, and we then say, 'Yes, but that was nothing to do with the accountable devolved policing. That was to do with these other policing arrangements we helped to legislate for.' We are then like Clouseau in one of the 'Pink Panther' movies where he sees a man with a dog and asks, 'Does your dog bite?' The man says, 'No.' Clouseau pets the dog and the dog nearly takes his arm off. Clouseau then says, 'I thought you told me your dog doesn't bite,' and the man says, 'That's not my dog.' We cannot say, 'We've sorted out policing, and we have full accountability and a full and open complaints process, but meanwhile anything goes in relation to how this Parliament here at Westminster legislates for other aspects of policing.'"

We have the duty to get it right now and into the future.

In that regard, we are not alone. In an article that the former head of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), Mr Jim Gamble, did for the 'Belfast Telegraph', he said that the new NCA must be fully accountable to the Policing Board.

These are people who speak with a level of authority. They went through the pain of Patten. Regardless of what the Chief Constable has said in recent weeks, the PSNI, at the launch of the NIPB human rights annual report, said:

"There is no doubt that the expertise of the NCA is necessary to keep people safe. But operational control must fall to the Chief Constable. NCA's operation in Northern Ireland must fit with the existing accountability structures of the Policing Board and the Ombudsman so that we can continue to maintain and build public confidence in policing."

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will, when I have finished.

This is what the PSNI said, Mr Speaker. It said:

"We cherish the accountability mechanisms that have been built up for policing over the last decade. And while we acknowledge that accountability arrangements are for politicians to agree; the police service has a desire that local accountability for policing is not diluted by the introduction of the NCA."

So, our voice is not a lone voice crying in some forgotten wilderness of the Assembly. It is one that is supported

by the good authority of the PSNI and the likes of Jim Gamble. It is also reflected on the wider international stage in relation to how a citizen's rights are protected through oversight and accountability.

The SDLP has worked hard and will continue to work hard to get this right. We are not against the NCA of itself.

I give way to Mr Humphrey.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much. I asked the Chief Constable about the issue of accountability when he appeared in front of the Committee for Justice on 19 September this year. He said:

"I understand fully the issues of accountability, which are critical for me. We have had a significant change with the devolution of policing and justice, which includes control through the Justice Minister and the Policing Board".

Does the Member not agree with me and those who sit on these Benches that the Police Service of Northern Ireland is one of the most accountable police services not just in this kingdom but across western Europe? The accountability measures that you are talking about are in place, and you are dancing on the head of a pin. Further to that, what exactly do you mean when you say to this House that you will hold a veto?

Mr Speaker: Order. I must warn all Members that interventions should be very brief.

Mrs D Kelly: I will deal with the last point first. It was not about our party holding a veto; it was about the Chief Constable holding a power of veto over NCA operations. I want to make that clear. Secondly, yes; we do have the most accountable police service in the western world, thanks largely to the hard work of my predecessors in the SDLP to get it right and call it right. I am not in any way embarrassed to claim that particular ground. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not have debate across the Chamber. The Member has the Floor. Allow the Member to finish.

Mrs D Kelly: This is the second time that such a debate has taken place in the House. We had an opportunity to sign a petition of concern in respect of the main motion, but we want to get the message across that we want to see the NCA operate. We want that resource to be available to the PSNI when it is fighting organised crime, but we want it done on the right principles and the right basis. I again call on the Home Secretary to meet my party and face up to our concerns. Just because police services across the water accepted something less does not mean that we have to follow suit. I commend amendment No 1 to the House.

Mr Hussey: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after the second "trafficking;" and insert:

"and calls on Her Majesty's Government to implement the legislative requirements to enable the NCA to operate fully in Northern Ireland."

I am pleased to speak on the issue of the National Crime Agency and to propose the Ulster Unionist amendment. Before I go on, I would like to agree with Mr McIlveen's comments about the bravery and courage of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, an organisation in which I had the honour to serve. However, his memory does not seem to

be very good. When his former leader was carried out of this Building, he stood on the steps outside and told the RUC not to come crying to him when their houses were on fire. Therefore, the Member has a bit of a cheek to make politics out of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Our amendment is simple. It asks the Westminster Government to act on our behalf should we be unable to reach agreement on the operation of the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland. So far, we have proven unable to do that, with Sinn Féin and the SDLP continuing in their opposition to an agency that exists to fight serious and organised crime. The fact that the NCA has gone live in the rest of the United Kingdom but not in Northern Ireland means that we are already too late in some respects, but the situation can be salvaged.

I welcome the fact that the SDLP appears to be still trying to engage and work constructively through the issues that it may have with accountability. The joke was not very good, but the issues are still there. However, Sinn Féin's blatant anti-British approach to security issues shows a real immaturity to govern. It is probably a lost cause in this particular debate. In short, it remains to be seen whether a way forward can be found.

In the past, many people have spoken about the importance of the NCA's role in areas such as human trafficking, cybercrime and child exploitation, so I want to move on and discuss in more detail the opposition to the NCA. It is mostly centred on the accountability of the NCA when it is operating in Northern Ireland. As a member of the Policing Board, I fully understand and respect the specific accountability measures for policing here. I also believe that the NCA should respect the devolution arrangements that are in place, not only here but in Scotland and Wales. On that premise, I am at one with those on the other side of the House. However, I differ in that I believe that those accountability concerns have been suitably addressed. It is the case that the NCA will respect the primacy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The NCA's director general will not have the powers of a constable in Northern Ireland. Control remains with the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

It is also a statutory obligation for the director general to attend the Policing Board at least once a year, and, as a member of the Policing Board, I certainly welcome the scrutiny function that we have been afforded in that regard. Keith Bristow has also indicated a willingness to meet the Justice Committee if asked. I am sure that the representatives of all parties, particularly Sinn Féin and the SDLP, will ensure that he is asked. The director general's annual plan would also need the consent of our Justice Minister where it related to Northern Ireland. Further to that, and unlike in England and Wales, the director general will not be able to direct the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to undertake any particular action. As I said earlier, control will remain with the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Those are significant amendments to reflect the specific policing and accountability arrangements that exist in Northern Ireland. I hope that Members will see that there has been a real effort to address concerns. I believe that the NCA, as proposed, should be acceptable to all. However, I would express an element of caution that we do not dilute the NCA to such an extent that it is rendered

ineffective. I am sure that the Justice Minister will bear that in mind.

At the outset, I mentioned the amendment that has been tabled in my name and that of my colleague Tom Elliott. I want to return to it now. It calls on:

"Her Majesty's Government to implement the legislative requirements to enable the NCA to operate fully in Northern Ireland."

Of course, the NCA could and should have been fully operational in Northern Ireland as a result of the Crime and Courts Act, which has passed through the legislative process at Westminster. That Act abolished the Serious and Organised Crime Agency and established the National Crime Agency. However, as we know, a legislative consent motion could not be agreed to allow Westminster to proceed with some of the relevant clauses on Northern Ireland. Agreement at a later date than originally envisaged between the parties in the Assembly is the next preferable option, and I hope that the SDLP will see sense. However, if that agreement is not forthcoming, the Ulster Unionist Party believes that, as a matter of security, the Westminster Government should implement whatever legislative requirements are necessary to circumvent the unwillingness of some parties in the House and allow the PSNI all the tools it needs in its fight against serious and organised crime.

This whole area has been a test of the devolution of policing and justice, and that test has failed thus far. We are in a situation in which the UK agency that deals with the most serious criminals is not in operation here. The National Crime Agency is a body that has been set up to tackle the exploitation of children, robustly pursue the most serious criminals and have international links in a raft of countries. The current situation is not something that I or anyone else in the House should be proud of. It does little to inspire confidence in how the Assembly is delivering for the people of Northern Ireland. I call on the House to support our amendment.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. One fundamental issue lies at the heart of the debate: police accountability to the local oversight mechanisms of the Policing Board and the Police Ombudsman's office. If the NCA as envisaged were to set up here today, that accountability would be compromised. I will return to that later in my speech, but, before I do, I want to deal with the Chief Constable's claims that a failure to establish the NCA here will undermine his ability to protect life under article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and tackle serious crime. I interrogated the Chief Constable on that issue at the last Policing Board meeting less than two weeks ago —

Mr Allister: [Inaudible.] interrogate you.

Mr Sheehan: I beg your pardon?

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to finish.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: Go ahead.

Mr Spratt: Did you interrogate the Chief Constable or did you question him?

Mr Sheehan: Interrogate. The Chief Constable made that claim, but, in the course of that interrogation, he was not

able to substantiate it. He can make all sorts of claims and assertions, but he has to back them up with evidence.

4.00 pm

The Chief Constable is very well paid; he earns almost £200,000 a year — more than anybody in the House. The reason why he gets so well paid is because he has some very serious responsibilities. If he sees a possible threat to life, it is his job to tackle it. If he foresees something coming down the tracks at him where there is going to be a gap, it is his responsibility to plug that gap. There is no point saying, "Oh, it is the politicians' fault". That is why he gets so well paid. It is his job to protect life. He cannot just blame all the rest of us. If there are issues of resourcing, the Chief Constable should go along to the Justice Minister or to the British Home Secretary and ask for the resources that would have gone to the NCA for its operation in the North here to be reallocated to the PSNI instead. It is quite simple.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. As you heard me refer to earlier, when the Chief Constable came in front of the Justice Committee, he said in reply to a question:

"We see a growing threat to our young people's well-being here because of drugs, people trafficking, cybercrime and a range of areas that we were not facing just a few years ago."

Given the fact —

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I warn the entire House: interventions here or anywhere else should be brief, so the convention of interventions is that they are brief.

Mr Humphrey: I am coming to the question, Mr Speaker. Given that there are new crimes that were not there a number of years ago, and given that the resources that he talks about are now limited because of the decision of his party and the SDLP in the past, why will your party not support giving extra resources to the police to deal with the crime and criminality, which is affecting young people in particular in societies such as north Belfast and west Belfast?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I suppose I could ask the Member why he would not stand with the rest of us and condemn the thuggish and violent attack on Belfast's first citizen. He was given 15 or 20 opportunities — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Sheehan: — on Radio Ulster, and he could not take one of them. Therefore, he does not speak with any authority here on law and order issues.

There has been a lot of scaremongering by the parties opposite. It has been stated in the media that if the NCA does not set up shop here, there will be limited access to NCA intelligence and to CEOP material. That is totally untrue and a cynical manipulation of public fears. I also questioned the Chief Constable on that at the last Policing Board meeting. I asked him whether there would be any restrictions on information sharing between any of the law enforcement agencies on these islands or further afield.

The answer was a categoric no from Matt Baggott and ACC Harris. So, please stop the cynical manipulation of people's fears out there. There will not be any restrictions on information sharing.

Mr D McIlveen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: No; I have already given way enough.

At the outset, I said that I would return to the issue of accountability. The facts are clear. If the NCA sets up here in the same way as across the water, we will have two-tier policing: one tier, the PSNI, will be accountable to the local oversight mechanisms; and the other, the NCA, will not be accountable. What are the implications of that? Let me quote Jim Gamble:

"So to accountability; policing ... and partnership working with national and transnational law enforcement agencies is too important for the issues to be lost in threatening rhetoric. Suggesting that engagement with the NCA is all or nothing misses the fundamental issue: without local lines of accountability tied down in legislation the huge progress we have made in the past decade could be put at risk."

He goes on to say:

"I am sure you will have your own opinion and view of history but the lesson is clear: create a policing organisation that operates to a different standard of accountability and no matter what your logic, significant numbers of people will not trust or support it, and that goes for those inside and outside the police."

Mr Dickson: There is no doubt that the absence of a fully functioning National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland will have a negative effect and impact on our ability to deal with serious crime, no matter what others may say.

In reference to its predecessor SOCA, I had the privilege of hosting an event for them in Parliament Buildings so that they could explain the workings of that organisation to those who wished to come and listen.

Anyone who doubts that just needs to look at the facts from last year: people trafficked into Northern Ireland from across the globe for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, extortion, moneylending, robbery, contraband, burglary from paramilitaries and nearly 4,500 drug seizures. Those problems are not unique to Northern Ireland. They are international issues that demand an international response. The NCA offers that response, working, as the Home Office says, to connect:

"the efforts of local policing and neighbourhood action to national agencies and action overseas to coordinate the fight against some of the UK's most harmful criminals."

We should not be under any illusion that those harmful criminals also operate in this jurisdiction and that our Police Service is isolated and has one hand tied behind its back in attempting to deal with those matters.

I made this case strongly in the House when we discussed the matter on 4 February. The arguments have been discussed thoroughly in this House and behind the scenes since then. The question, it now being October and the NCA going live last week, is how we move this debate

forward to find a solution that is satisfactory to allow an LCM to pass.

The Minister has already secured important and significant concessions on how the NCA would operate in Northern Ireland, taking into account our local issues and sensitivities. He has been working extremely hard to address concerns about accountability. Those discussions have been going on for months. While the time was available, that was fair enough. However, we are no longer talking about some hypothetical situation about what may happen if we do not have an LCM in place before the NCA begins operation. Well, we are now in that situation, where we have no means available to us in Northern Ireland to go after the assets gained through criminal behaviour that may be taking place as we debate this motion. This is now and this is real, and we need to get the political agreement to block gaps that exist.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that he will agree with the PSNI when it states in its preamble to the Policing Board's human rights report:

"The fundamental building blocks for community confidence and the delivery of effective policing are human rights and accountability."

So will the Alliance Party join us in ensuring that that accountability mechanism is reached?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Dickson: Thank you. The question that we are dealing with today is whether it is possible to deal with everyone's concerns and whether everybody will be entirely happy with every aspect of how the NCA operates. That is what is being debated here and was discussed behind the scenes for several months. That is what remains to be seen following today's debate.

We have to weigh up and strike a balance between not getting every last dot of what we want and not being able to tackle serious and organised criminality. These issues need to be resolved as a matter of urgency.

We cannot support either amendment on the grounds that neither recognises what is required or possible under the devolution settlement. The SDLP on the one hand calls on the Minister of Justice to bring forward amendments to legislation, which he cannot do. What he can do is work with the Home Secretary to seek such amendments but that will require a firm indication from this Assembly and the Assembly parties that they will support some measures through a legislative consent motion. Again, we come back to the need to urgently reach political agreement here among ourselves.

The Ulster Unionist Party amendment, incredibly, calls on Her Majesty's Government to do something that they cannot do without an LCM being passed by the Assembly.

We have more to gain than to lose by having the NCA working here in the devolved arena. Some concerns have been resolved and others continue to need to be dealt with. The Minister and his officials have worked hard and innovatively to address concerns around accountability. The time for that debate is fast drawing to a close. Parties now need to work together to finalise a package of measures that would allow us all to move forward and support an LCM.

Mr Craig: I welcome the ability to rise here to debate the issue of the National Crime Agency. Others were right when they raised the issue of this being debated previously. When it was debated previously, we were not sitting in a vacuum because SOCA was still in place. The one thing that has changed fundamentally in the debate is that others have now prevaricated for so long on the issue that we find ourselves without the National Crime Agency and without SOCA. What are the consequences? There are always consequences of losing any organisation and its ability to help and assist in some areas.

The one area that is missing dramatically from the jigsaw of tackling serious and organised crime in our society is assets recovery. I find myself asking why anyone has allowed themselves to get into the position where that tool in the armoury of the police force of Northern Ireland is no longer there. What are we trying to say to the criminal fraternity? Are we saying, "If you want to do business, Northern Ireland is a great place to do it because, quite frankly, it is the one place where they will never get at your assets"? I know that we want to tackle the whole issue of housing and some of the negative equity that is out there, but I do not think that this is a good way to do that. Those are not the sort of people we want to invite into Northern Ireland. If anyone is in any doubt about whether they are here, I can tell them that they are here. Several cases are now being processed from which assets should be recovered, but, today, we are in a position where that cannot happen.

I look forward to my colleagues opposite supporting legislation coming through the House to allow the PSNI to take on that task. Why have I got doubts in my mind about whether they will ever do that? I can see section 75, an equality Act and a million other things being put in the way of allowing that to happen. All that just says that Northern Ireland is an open house for the serious criminal. We are sending out the wrong message. That is where everybody is getting it wrong about this.

I have some sympathy over the whole issue of accountability; others do not seem to get that accountability stops with the Chief Constable. Whether it was SOCA or will be the National Crime Agency, it has to stop with the Chief Constable. The one thing that will not occur in any jurisdiction in the UK is the National Crime Agency actively carrying out any task in that region without the knowledge and agreement of that region's chief constable. The Minister had talks with the Home Office about that very issue. I do not know why others cannot understand that, for anyone to assist or work with a police force in an area or jurisdiction, they must work with them, not against them. If we had two forces working against each other in Northern Ireland, we would find out very quickly that that does not work, it is counterproductive and that the only people who gain from it are the criminals.

The reality of the situation for the National Crime Agency is that it will work hand in glove with the Chief Constable and the PSNI when it comes to dealing with any criminal activity. That very organisation gave us reassurances at the Policing Board that that would be the case. What criminal activity is it tackling? It is tackling the sex trade, cybercrime, smuggling, human trafficking and terrorism, whether home-grown or international. As the only part of the United Kingdom with a land border with another

country, we are inviting the criminal fraternity into Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Mr Craig: We should not do that. I, therefore, support my party's motion and amendment No 2.

4.15 pm

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo agus beimid ag tabhairt tacaíocht don leasú. I welcome this debate. We will support the SDLP amendment.

Sinn Féin has fought very hard to bring about a more accountable and effective civic police service. It is disappointing to hear some in the Assembly use the emotive issues of crime, human trafficking and child exploitation to score political points about the British National Crime Agency. For anyone to use the Floor of the Assembly to ferment public panic about sex crime and child abuse is an abhorrence. The PSNI has established new public protection units that operate in unison with other statutory bodies and take a multiagency approach. The Assembly also introduced new, more stringent notifications for serious sex offenders in recent legislation that the Minister of Justice was involved in delivering. Alongside that, we have entities such as the Safeguarding Board for the North, and the Minister of Health, along with other Ministers, is involved in that.

Of course, we have had the recent very serious controversy about children in care homes while under the supervision of the Department of Health. That has again revealed — if we needed reminding — the need for eternal vigilance and scrutiny and the failings in some parts of the local institutions. We have raised this matter at the Policing Board, but the PSNI should have been left in no doubt about its responsibilities in child protection, tackling crime and dealing decisively with human trafficking. We need to see results in addressing those serious crimes, and Sinn Féin will be scrutinising that very carefully at the Policing Board. A good starting point would be to set targets and to write them into the policing plan, as stated in the Barnardo's report. We assure the House that we will fight to ensure that such targets are there.

In all that, there has been no mention of the NCA. That is because safeguarding local people is a local responsibility, and local institutions, including the local police service, need to step up to the challenge and discharge their statutory duties.

The online exploitation of children and young people is detected through an international network that includes the cooperation of industry and the role of the North American-based National Criminal Intelligence Resource Center. That type of crime requires international information sharing. No one in the Assembly is claiming that the PSNI ceased or will cease to obtain that information under the new arrangements. To say that would be to mislead the Assembly. It has been claimed in the Assembly that the arrangements to deal with online child exploitation and protection no longer operate here, but that is not the case. Actually, the facilities that CEOP provided to the PSNI before the creation of the NCA are exactly the same as those that are provided now. CEOP carries out early analysis and risk assessment, which is then passed to the PSNI for executive action. If the PSNI

is not acting, it is failing in its job. If the Minister of Justice is not ensuring that the PSNI is acting, he is failing in his job. So, it is incorrect and very misleading to say that work will not happen in that area without having the NCA in the North.

I and the Assembly should be more concerned about the nature of information sharing across the island. We still do not have a fully integrated, searchable, electronic all-Ireland sex offenders' register, despite calls from my party and others for it to be introduced. The intergovernmental agreement legislating for information sharing between the Garda Síochána and the PSNI is now 11 years old and is, therefore, very much out of date. For anyone who is genuinely concerned about child exploitation and human trafficking on this island of Ireland, that would be a good place to start. Indeed, I note suggestions that the NCA itself is considering opening a sub-office in Dublin. So, partnership is required not only east-west but North/South. Anyone who is genuinely concerned about child exploitation, human trafficking or other manifestations of international organised crime would recognise that. Unfortunately, the motion does not.

The public deserve to see an informed, intelligent debate in the Assembly. I invite the Minister to bring forward to the Assembly details of the number of individuals who have been convicted before the courts here for involvement in international child exploitation and the number who have been convicted of international human trafficking. It is obvious that those crimes are global in nature —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Ms Ruane: — but what is the scale of the impact here? The former head of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre has given evidence in Westminster, and we have heard about that.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Humphrey: I support the motion and pay tribute to the SOCA staff for the role that they played in Northern Ireland in the fight against crime and criminality along with the Royal Ulster Constabulary and, more recently, the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

As we move to the formation of a National Crime Agency in the United Kingdom, it is absolutely crucial that Northern Ireland be included in that. We heard today from the deputy leader of the SDLP that it has an issue with accountability. To be fair, we have heard that before. I welcome the fact that that party has been having conversations with the Minister and is seeking a meeting with the Home Secretary in the national Government. That should happen, and, as far as is possible, those assurances should be given to the SDLP, because it is crucial that the National Crime Agency be extended and become fully operational in Northern Ireland. It is important that accountability is not seen as some fig leaf or a stalling or blocking tactic to the NCA being established here. In the context of accountability, we have a Justice Minister in a local devolved Administration, a Policing Board, a Justice Committee and this House. With all those structures and institutions in place, have we no faith and confidence in ourselves that we can hold the NCA to account?

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member very much for giving way. The Member for South Down opposite has just made an analogy in which CEOP would continue to share

information, but it obviously does so under legislation. However, bearing in mind that the NCA will also share information but not under any legislation, does it not stand to sense that Sinn Féin's position on this has made the NCA less accountable than had there been legislation in place?

Mr Speaker: I am almost coming to a point at which I will have to intervene on Members who ask for an intervention and, when a Member gives them the Floor, eat into that Member's time. I do not want to do that, but Members are leaving me with very little choice.

I ask the Member to continue. He has an added minute.

Mr Humphrey: I agree entirely with my colleague from North Antrim.

Organised crime and criminality such as cybercrime, drug dealing, human trafficking, the sex trade and fuel laundering is clearly very lucrative. The National Crime Agency is crucial and essential in dealing with crime and criminality, and delaying its extension to Northern Ireland will cost lives and money and will be to the advancement and betterment of only the criminals and the criminality that they are involved in. Matt Baggott has clearly indicated that a financial cost would result from the NCA not being fully extended to Northern Ireland. That would be costs in resources and an opportunity cost because of the resource from the rest of the United Kingdom that cannot be deployed here. That is simply not good enough, and it leaves our people exposed and not protected in certain areas. Young people in Northern Ireland are further exposed to crime, not just local crime but international crime and the new crime that we talked about earlier, and they have less protection than their peers in the rest of the UK. Human trafficking is a huge problem facing not just Northern Ireland but the rest of the United Kingdom. It is important that international crime such as human trafficking and drug dealing is not dumped over the border into Northern Ireland if there are protections in the Irish Republic that do not prevail here. We must not become the soft underbelly of crime in the UK.

I am concerned that we will move forward without the joined-upness and the collaborative approach of the NCA, which is essential for Northern Ireland. That will leave our young people and our communities, which have been ravaged by crime and criminality over the past 40 years — much of it organised through paramilitary organisations, and that is where we differ from the rest of the UK — further exposed, because we will not have those protections in place.

As I said earlier, crime and criminality is a huge and growing industry in Northern Ireland, and many people are very wealthy because of it. Every resource and tool must be used by the state and the police, which must be absolutely accountable to government, to eradicate crime and criminality as far as possible.

For us to do anything other or less than that is highly irresponsible. It is not good government. It exposes the Assembly to extreme ridicule and, quite frankly, if we do not move forward, Members on the other side of the House will simply have sent a clear signal to the people of Northern Ireland that crime does pay, crime will pay, and we are not tough on criminals, on the causes of crime —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member close his remarks?

Mr Humphrey: — and we will not deal with criminals.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At this time in the debate, I suppose that the difficulty is that a lot of the stuff has already been said and it may be a little repetitive.

I am up to speak against the motion tabled by the DUP and the amendment from the UUP. The motion begins:

"That this Assembly recognises the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in"

the North of Ireland. The NCA is operating in the North of Ireland, so I do not know how competent the motion is. It goes to state that such a failure:

"will impact on the PSNI's ability to protect life under Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998".

As Pat Sheehan has pointed out, that duty lies with the Chief Constable; it always has done and should continue to lie with him. It seems to me that the UUP amendment is, at best, not devolutionist and is possibly not competent. It asks the British Government to completely ignore the Assembly and bring in laws above our heads. I do not know what else that is, but it is certainly not devolutionist.

Both parties, I think, are hankering back to the old RUC. We know what that lesson was: unaccountability. We know where it went, and, of course, in a way, they have pointed out what is at the base of the discussion today, which is that unaccountability has been seen. The experience in the past is that that will lead to corruption. They did, in the end, sign up to Patten. They signed up to the Good Friday Agreement, in the end, to St Andrews and, indeed, to Hillsborough and to the devolution of policing and justice. In the end, the core issue, is, in a way, quite simple: it is about accountability, accountability to the Policing Board and the ombudsman.

The myth perpetuated is that the pursuit of organised crime has, in some way, ceased. Of course, it clearly has not. Is the NCA refusing to cooperate with the PSNI, the Garda Síochána or any European police service? No, it is not. Is it refusing to give information? No, it is not. Is it refusing to accept information? In all of those occasions, no it is not. On child exploitation, on drugs, on human trafficking, cross-border smuggling or any other crime in the long list of illegal activities under the banner of serious and organised crime, there is cooperation. Those on the Benches across the way would say that there is not. Well, I hope that they are wrong, and I believe that they are wrong.

In Keith Bristow's letter to the Policing Board recently — I think that it was on 24 September — he makes it very clear that he wants further assistance. He wants to rely on the PSNI and to deal with the Garda Síochána, and he wants to build on the positive existing relationships. So, he certainly thinks that they need to be built on, despite the fact, which you may understand, that he wants more ability to use his power. However, our experience — this is nothing to do with Keith Bristow or any other person who may take up that post — is that, if you do not have accountability, and we fought hard for it, you will have serious difficulties as we go forward.

I suppose that the question is this: can accountability be sorted? Of course, it can; I think that everybody agrees on that. I do not want to exaggerate, but, in a way, it would

be the stroke of a pen. The British Home Secretary could have sorted this out a long time ago and still has the ability to sort it out, in which case we would not be debating the issue. Why should officers not be accountable? Nobody on the Benches over there has explained that. Why do unionists not want him to be accountable? A lot of questions have been asked of republicans and nationalists, but why you do not want him to be accountable is another question. I spoke of our experience in the past —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: I will not.

We are not going to go back to the days when there was a lack of accountability, with all that that caused. In fact, we are still dealing with the legacy of that unaccountability today and will be doing so into the future. Sinn Féin is having ongoing talks with the Justice Minister, as are other parties. We believe that this can be fixed, and we want it to be fixed as soon as possible. I argue that all parties in the Assembly should be assisting the Justice Minister to get the type of accountability mechanisms already agreed — the same as for the PSNI. It is clear from what has been said across the Chamber that those accountability mechanisms do not exist. As for assets recovery —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr G Kelly: Surely the Minister will talk about a bespoke method of assets recovery that the PSNI can use here? That is what we should aim for.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

4.30 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support my party's amendment. I understand and have listened to the concerns about how the potential failure to establish the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland could impact on the PSNI's ability to do its job properly. I also hear the concerns about the impact on the PSNI's resources. It could be clearly argued that those resources have been drastically wasted this year on flag protests, parades and so on that should not be happening anyway. However, those concerns are not reason enough to acquiesce to the implementation of a flawed Bill that would undermine public confidence in policing here through a lack of local accountability and scrutiny.

The most direct impact from the failure to establish the NCA in the North is on the PSNI's relationship with some other serious and organised crime agencies. The NCA will operate in Northern Ireland on matters that are not devolved, such as immigration, customs-related crime, people trafficking and fuel laundering. It will also be able to provide advice and support to the PSNI in relation to devolved matters —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGlone: Just a minute. However, until proper accountability mechanisms are in place, the role of the NCA here will continue to threaten public confidence in the mode of civic policing that the Policing Board and the current Chief Constable have been pursuing. I give way to the Member.

Mr Wells: I detect a softening of the SDLP's position on this, and I welcome that. I hope that your discussions

with the Home Office bear fruit, but the problem with the Member's argument is that it still leaves drug barons, human traffickers, crime —

Mr Speaker: I detect that the Member will be brief.

Mr Wells: I am. It leaves people like "Slab" Murphy sitting on vast amounts of money and assets in Northern Ireland as a result of those crimes. As a result of what he is suggesting, police will not be able to seize one penny of those assets.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for detecting what he perceives to be a softening. Because I say something one way does not mean to say that my position has softened. I might have a soft approach to these matters, but my position is definitely not soft.

I have not heard one argument from the other side that makes the case that this should be done in an unaccountable and irresponsible way compared with local policing authorities. I have not heard one good example of how or why that should be done or even one case made that says that the NCA should not be held to account, should not be transparent and should not be held properly responsible through locally accountable methods and mechanisms.

The concerns that we and others had about the NCA when the Assembly took the decision in February not to proceed with a legislative consent motion on the Crime and Courts Bill remain the same. Indeed, those concerns are shared by the PSNI. As it stated on 14 May:

"we are acutely aware that the confidence and consent of the whole community are essential to the delivery of policing. We recognise that agreed accountability plays a central role in achieving this."

The Chief Constable has suggested an alternative accountability mechanism, but it is dependent on the British Government consenting to complete transparency to the PSNI of the NCA's intelligence, investigations and operational activity.

Mr Craig: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGlone: I am sorry; I cannot. I will run out of time.

That, I suggest, is no more likely than complete transparency of MI5's intelligence, investigations and operational activities.

We do not believe that there is sufficient local accountability or oversight enshrined in the legislation at present to secure full public confidence in the agency. It is clear that the NCA was always intended to take on a more widespread and visible role than any agency before. It has repeatedly been referred to as a UK version of the FBI. It is that enhanced role that demands robust scrutiny, transparency and accountability mechanisms to be put in place. The Crime and Courts Bill did not provide those mechanisms. That is why, in our amendment, we call on the Minister of Justice and the Home Secretary to urgently introduce statutory amendments to guarantee that the NCA and its operations in Northern Ireland are fully accountable to the Policing Board.

The SDLP has strongly, robustly and, on all occasions, consistently supported the fight against organised crime,

but we do not support the creation of a new layer of policing that will not be accountable to anyone other than the British Home Secretary. That is not simply about the here and now; it is also about policing into the future, which our party has had a huge stake in. Local accountability and scrutiny of policing was and remains a vital part of securing and maintaining public confidence in the Assembly and the wider democratic accountability chain. The risk of the NCA operating without those same checks and balances in place here should be evident to all.

Mr McCallister: Probably the key question in the entire debate is this: what is in the public interest? It is overwhelmingly in the public interest to have the National Crime Agency operating in this part of the country. Let us look at some of the issues. Do we have a problem with organised crime? Look at some of the reports. Potential victims of human trafficking have been rescued. There have been 4,500 drugs seizures, with a value of £10.2 million. There have been nearly 2,800 arrests for drugs offences, and that is up by 10% on the previous year. Twenty-two fuel laundering plants have been dismantled, and 820,000 litres of illicit fuel have been seized, as has £1.3 million in criminal assets. We have a problem with criminal activity and organised crime in Northern Ireland, and we need a solution. We need to have the confidence to move forward and bring the NCA here quickly.

Although it pains me to say it, the Minister is right on the issue. I hope that, in his response to the debate, he will say at what stage are the negotiations about organising the accountability mechanisms to meet some of the concerns of the SDLP and Sinn Féin. I find it bizarre that Sinn Féin says that there may be a sub-office of the NCA in Dublin but we would not want an office here in Belfast or somewhere in Northern Ireland. That example highlights that the level of British-Irish cooperation has moved on in the past 15 years. There are possibly other parties here that have not moved as far in the past 15 years. I have not heard many Members arguing against having accountability measures. I do not think that any of us want to go down the road of there being no accountability or structure. Mr McGlone made the point about the NCA being accountable to only a British Home Secretary. The British Home Secretary is a Member of the House of Commons, and his party leader is a Member of the House of Commons as well. There are accountability measures in that. There are accountability measures here. I remind Members that the Minister of Justice enjoys his position because nearly everyone here voted for him on two occasions. I did not, and neither did Mr Elliott.

The issue should be sorted out round the Executive table instead of having the debate in here. We have a motion tabled by one of the leading partners in our coalition Government with amendments from smaller parties in the coalition Government being responded to by the smallest party in the coalition Government with not-quite-agreement on what we are doing. We need to find out where the blockages are. Everyone here, I think, is in agreement on a measure of accountability. Sinn Féin needs to have the confidence that we have all moved on significantly. This society and policing have changed dramatically from the 1990s. Sinn Féin needs to have the confidence to say, "Get some of the accountability measures in place, and get on with bringing this agency here". Do not hide behind the view that because it is an idea from the Government in Westminster we cannot bring

it here. We need it here. It is in the public interest and in the interests of all of the citizens who send us here to serve that we get that agency here and working. That is the important point that we have to always remember: what is in the public interest? Let us act accordingly with that, and I look forward to the Minister robustly stating the work that he has carried out in getting the negotiations to this level. If colleagues need reassurance and have to go and meet the Home Secretary —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr McCallister: — then go and meet the Home Secretary, but get it sorted out, and quickly, and get the NCA working here, fighting crime and carrying out good work.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: Whatever the academic niceties that might attach to the debate about accountability, this matter reduces at a practical level to a clear choice for the House and its Members: do we wish to facilitate criminality by removing from the armoury of those in the business of resisting and defeating criminality weapons such as assets recovery, which come as a consequence of the NCA, or are we so hung up on the niceties of accountability that we are prepared to sacrifice the pursuit of organised crime and the pursuit of its assets so that some in their mind might tick some accountability box?

It is no surprise to me that those who are cronies of people such as "Slab" Murphy naturally take a stance to obstruct and to thwart the National Crime Agency, but it is a disappointment to me that those on the nationalist side of the community who have stood on the side of law and order make a choice that it is more important to dance on the head of that pin than it is to fight organised crime. I have to say to them that they have a choice to make. They have to decide which side of the argument they really want to be left on. If they have got themselves on a hook about the matter, it is time to get off that hook. I really do not understand some of their accountability arguments. They say that the Chief Constable is not accountable about this because the National Crime Agency is not accountable to the Policing Board. However, as has been pointed out in the debate, if the Chief Constable calls in the National Crime Agency, then he — the Chief Constable — is accountable to the Policing Board for explaining and standing over that decision. There you have the accountability by the right chain of command that should flow. The Chief Constable is accountable to the Policing Board for actions that he takes, such as relying on and calling in the National Crime Agency. So, I really think that the SDLP is dancing on the head of a pin in this regard.

Meanwhile, who is rejoicing in this situation? Who is exploiting this situation? Who is making their criminal empire greater out of this situation? It is those who happily carry on, knowing that the criminal fraternity that they oversee is free from the reach of the NCA.

That is what Members need to grapple with — not with the niceties of some contrived, constructed argument about accountability, but with the realities of the situation. That is the point that I wish some in the House would come to terms with.

4.45 pm

Of course, I must also point out that we would not be in this hateful dilemma, we would not be lagging behind the rest of the United Kingdom and we would not be in a situation in which the National Crime Agency cannot operate in Northern Ireland but for the folly of devolving policing and justice to the House. It is in consequence of that, and the Sinn Féin veto that came with it, that the friends of "Slab" Murphy can block the operation of the NCA. Therefore, the responsibility goes a little wider than those who are engaged in that exercise today.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I welcome the motion and the debate we have had today, which I believe has addressed some very serious points. On 7 October, the National Crime Agency replaced the Serious Organised Crime Agency, which operated here in Northern Ireland since 2007. I want to start by paying tribute to the work that SOCA did. I saw that at first hand as chair of the Organised Crime Task Force and, indeed, in meeting the staff of SOCA.

I have stressed all along that the absence of a fully functioning National Crime Agency here within our structures will hamper our approach to tackling serious and organised criminals. Let me emphasise that point. The absence of a fully functioning NCA in Northern Ireland will blunt our effort against serious and organised criminals. Not only will that be to their profit, but it will be to the detriment of our society and the safety of our citizens. That detriment includes through serious offences such as human trafficking, armed robbery, drugs smuggling and child exploitation. We are not talking about minor matters; we are talking about extremely serious offences perpetrated against potentially vulnerable individuals, with the proceeds of that crime lining the pockets of unscrupulous criminals.

Caitríona Ruane said that she was disappointed by political points being made about serious crime. I am afraid that I am making serious points about serious crime. I am not exaggerating the difficulties we will have without the NCA being fully operational, but nor am I making light of those difficulties. I want to be clear, as the Chief Constable of the PSNI has been clear, that today there is a gap in our law enforcement effort. Until last week, SOCA could pursue all civil recovery here. The NCA is limited to non-devolved cases. Even in the cases it can undertake, the NCA cannot pursue assets outside our jurisdiction. Furthermore, NCA officers will not have operational powers to assist the police with investigations in the devolved arena.

We do not have a statutory role in NCA planning arrangements, so our influence on the priorities of the NCA will be limited. I believe that there is a danger that we send some kind of message that we in this jurisdiction simply do not want the NCA, which hardly helps the kind of cooperative working that some Members have talked about seeking.

So, although the NCA will have a role here with non-devolved matters, we are effectively asking our law enforcement agencies to operate with one arm tied behind their back. The current situation, with some powers continuing where they are non-devolved and others going, has created something of a maze for law enforcement agencies. Pat Sheehan said that if the NCA came as proposed, we would have some kind of two-tier policing. The reality is that we have that two-tier policing, with the

NCA operating in the non-devolved area, as Gerry Kelly actually pointed out, in an unusual contradiction between two Sinn Féin Members who spoke.

My clear goal is to now pursue the agreement to get an extension of the powers of the NCA as far as possible within our structures, so that the Justice Committee, the Executive and, ultimately, the Assembly can agree a way forward. I believe that that agreement is essential, and, indeed, that is what would be required by statute to make changes. Without the Assembly's consent, we cannot move forward, so, as a matter of law, I cannot support amendment No 2, from the Ulster Unionist Party, which calls for the UK Government to implement the legislative requirements to enable the NCA to operate fully in Northern Ireland. That would be a complete breach of the devolution settlement. It is simply not possible.

The procedure in the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is for Assembly consent followed by a Westminster order by the Home Secretary. That is the only way in which we will make progress, and that is the progress that I am seeking to make.

When we last debated the issue, it was clear that there was strong support from some parties for the NCA's functions being extended into the devolved sphere and concern from others about accountability. Indeed, we have heard much about accountability today. Although we secured concessions about the operation of the NCA here, I and my officials have been seeking to continue to address concerns. We had a number of what I hope the parties concerned would agree have been constructive and progressive exchanges. We also engaged with the Home Office and, contrary to the suggestion in amendment No 1, I believe that Home Office officials have been supportive and helpful in seeking to examine the accountability mechanisms. The discussions with parties have now reached the point where we need to move on. I believe that that could be done quickly, if parties looked at the extent of the safeguards on offer balanced against the risks left by the limits on the NCA's role.

Let me explain my objectives and what my proposals to move forward are. First, and I am confident that Members will agree on this because it has been expressed around the House today, the PSNI should have primacy in Northern Ireland. That is not negotiable. It is one of the points that I made to the Home Secretary, at a very early stage, and which she accepted. In fairness to the Home Secretary and the director general, I do not believe that there is any question of being asked to negotiate on that. The importance of that principle, however, needs to be reflected in the statutory arrangements. To secure it, I proposed that the police will task the activities of the NCA. The PSNI will be responsible for tasking the NCA. Indeed, my requirement is that there will need to be an agreement from the Chief Constable for any NCA operations. That is a point that was raised by Jonathan Craig, although I am not sure that I heard him exactly right. It is, in fact, the opposite of the position in England and Wales, where the director general of the NCA has the power to task chief constables. In Northern Ireland, the position would be that the PSNI have primacy, with the power of tasking residing with the Chief Constable of the PSNI over officers of the NCA. That is a very significant and substantial difference from what is happening elsewhere.

The second principle is that the NCA should fit within our general accountability structures. Under the proposals I developed, that would be achieved in a number of different ways. First, by accountability to the Policing Board. For example, the director general of the NCA would be required in statute to attend the Policing Board at least once a year. Indeed, the director general agreed to do so as often as is reasonably required. Secondly, the Policing Board would be consulted on the director general's annual plan. Furthermore, it is my intention that he would have to take account of the Policing Board's policing plan in developing his own plan. I believe that those assurances address the accountability points made by the Members who tabled amendment No 1. I trust that the ongoing engagement, of which Dolores Kelly spoke, will result in her and her colleagues and Sinn Féin Members being able to see the benefits of what we have proposed and to reach agreement. Indeed, I welcome the general willingness expressed in the Assembly this afternoon by Mrs Kelly and Mr Kelly — Dolores and Gerry — to engage, although not necessarily in exactly the same way.

What about the issue of police complaints? That is straightforward. As with the police, officers of the NCA would be accountable to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Not only would that accountability extend to their operations but to their conduct of civil recovery. Gerry Kelly, who is no longer in the Chamber, made, in a very brief point at the end of his speech, an argument for a local civil recovery body. I have argued against that. Even if we could get agreement, it would take significant time to implement, time that we do not have. It would be a drain on resources and the gap in the interim would, I believe, create major difficulties.

Let me repeat some of those key points. First, I believe that we need the NCA to assist our crime-fighting effort against organised criminals. It must fit within our particular devolved policing arrangements. So, police primacy is absolutely essential. Local accountability through the Policing Board and to the Police Ombudsman is essential.

I will deal with one or two other specific points made by Members. I will, I think, have to disappoint John McCallister, who asked me to detail the stage that negotiations between me and my officials, on the one hand, and Sinn Féin and SDLP representatives, separately, on the other, have reached. I am not sure that discussing the details of that kind of negotiation in a public forum is necessarily conducive to reaching agreement. However, I assure Mr McCallister, in his position on the opposition Benches, that I am seeking to engage with all parties in the Executive to carry forward the proposal constructively. I believe that that has seen significant progress in recent days, and I welcome the assurances that have come, as I said, from SDLP and Sinn Féin Members about their continuing willingness to engage on that.

I also think that we need to be very careful that we recognise the reality of what we can do and what we cannot do. I will repeat this point. Ross Hussey expressed his concern that the Minister might be about to dilute the NCA to the point of ineffectiveness, but I assure him and other Members that I am seeking to make the NCA effective and accountable, not one or the other. I believe that it is possible to do that, and I hope that the House will see its way to agreeing that at some stage in the near future.

We have had a number of constructive discussions between different parties. However, I believe that we are now at the point, given that the NCA is fully operational, where we need to conclude those discussions urgently. I have listened to a number of concerns from the parties and have sought to respond to them. I have been through a number of different rounds of discussions with the Home Office, and I remain willing to continue to take further points, if parties wish to make them to me, to ensure that we can get the best possible arrangements for Northern Ireland to continue to respond to the points that have been made. If we do not carry those things forward to reach agreement, I believe that we will be at the point where we will be undermining our efforts in fighting serious and organised crime in Northern Ireland.

I welcome that we have had this debate. Despite the fact that there has been a certain amount of finger pointing across the Chamber, there is a lot of agreement about ensuring that we have the best possible methods of fighting crime with the fullest possible accountability to recognise our specific architecture on policing matters here. That is a significant step forward for what might otherwise have been a very divisive debate.

I welcome the debate that we have had, and I support the motion and the interest that the Assembly has shown. I believe that we will get an operational NCA, with willingness and agreement from all parties, if we continue, for a further short period, the discussions that are happening.

In conclusion, I have expressed my significant reservations about what amendment No 2 would do for the devolution settlement. Although I agree with the broad sense of amendment No 1, I do not believe that it adds anything to the motion. I support the motion.

Mr Elliott: I welcome the opportunity to make a winding-up speech on amendment No 2, which my colleague Ross Hussey outlined at the beginning of the debate. I will make reference first to Mr McIlveen's proposal in the motion. We support the principle of the motion and do not have any difficulty with that. He made a political point about this party and the RUC, and I think that Mr Hussey addressed that. The inference of that was that those in glass houses should not throw stones. To be fair to him, I do not know how much conviction he was making the point with anyway, but we are in a position where we need the National Crime Agency fully implemented in Northern Ireland. There is no question about that, and the Minister outlined that position.

I want to state the Ulster Unionist Party's position. Our amendment to bring forward legislation from the UK Government can be done. My understanding is that the UK Government have supremacy, so I do not see the difficulty with it being done. I understand the point that the Minister and Mr Dickson made, in that it might not be in the spirit of the devolution process here. However, I have to say that, when the devolution of policing and justice was coming to Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist Party warned of such implications and difficulties.

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I will give way if you are quick.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member giving way. The reality is that the UK Parliament can legislate for any part of the

UK, but any such legislation without the legislative consent of this House would be a total breach of all the conventions surrounding devolution.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Elliott: I accept the Minister's point, but I think that he is broadly accepting that the UK Government can implement it. I know that, in the past, they have implemented legislation on some matters of difficulty. When the two main parties in the Chamber could not agree, the Westminster Government had to bring forward legislation. Therefore, there is a history of that happening.

5.00 pm

This is also an issue of national crime. It is not just about crime in Northern Ireland. It is about national crime, and it affects the whole nation. When I talk about national crime, I mean, of course, crime relating to the United Kingdom.

I would like the parties on the opposite side, which have continually opposed this, to soften their stance. Like Mr Wells, who made an intervention, when I read the first part of the SDLP's amendment, I thought that there was a softening of its position. Unfortunately, the SDLP rolls back to its traditional roots in the second part of its amendment.

I listened to some of the other Members' contributions. I think that Mr McCallister was complimentary of me. I am not entirely sure, but he seemed to be. In broad terms, he supports the position of our party and the Minister that the NCA should be implemented fully in Northern Ireland.

I listened to Mr Sheehan. The republicans used to have a call of "Brits out." I think that his call is now "No Brits in." His contribution was very disappointing. I feel that he does not want to recognise the importance of the National Crime Agency and the requirement for it to deal with drug trafficking, people trafficking, fuel smuggling and all those activities that were outlined by Mr McIlveen and Mr Craig, who told us about the sale of illegal goods. Everyone in the Chamber and every member of the public should accept that those are issues that need to be dealt with in the strongest possible way.

The Ulster Unionist Party wants its amendment to be made. We will support our amendment. I appreciate the DUP's support for our amendment. In general, we support its proposal as well. I hope that others will see the logic of our amendment. I hope that the SDLP will eventually come around to a reasonable way of thinking — that may not happen today, but I think that the SDLP's stance has softened to a degree — and allow the National Crime Agency to come to Northern Ireland in its entirety.

Mr Attwood: I agree with the sentiments expressed, including by Mr Humphrey and Mr McIlveen, that we need to put more resources into dealing with crime and organised crime. However, if we are to deal with the issue of the NCA, we have to deal with the multiple issues involved in putting resources into crime and organised crime. The Minister will know that, in my previous job, when we discovered the biggest ever illegal waste dump in these islands, waste crime was not on SOCA's radar at all. The Minister will confirm that, at that time, the Organised Crime Task Force, of which he is chair, had no work stream to deal with waste crime on the island of Ireland. If we are serious about dealing with crime and organised crime, let us look to ourselves as well as to the NCA.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will let the Member in.

Let us also remember what the assistant chief constable said at the Policing Board in March. He asked what happens when the PSNI wants to conduct an operation involving a trafficking gang, and officers:

"need their colleagues from tactical support to conduct a search, but those tactical support resources are dedicated to public order policing elsewhere in Northern Ireland".

If the DUP wants to challenge us about the NCA, and it is right to do so, it is right for us to challenge the DUP to take to heart the words of the assistant chief constable to the Policing Board in March that the police's capacity to deal with trafficking could be compromised because they are dealing with public disorder.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will let you in later.

Mr McIlveen made a very curious point, which Hansard will confirm. He asked why you would want a successor body to have more accountability than the previous one.

That was his argument to defeat our argument that there needs to be accountability around the NCA, when there was none around SOCA. To that, there are two replies. The first is that the SDLP opposed the SOCA legislation in the House of Commons partly because of the lack of accountability and partly because it was exempt from freedom of information legislation. We want both points addressed when it comes to the NCA. The second reply is that we have to learn the lesson of our history, which we can now share, and it is that our democracy is stronger when accountability is deeper. That is the nature of better democracy, and it serves the interests of us all. It is a point that Mr Allister, when he came down from the mountain and delivered his latest tablet of stone, seems to have ignored. How did he ignore it? He referred to Policing Board accountability as "niceties". Niceties, Mr Allister? These are not niceties; they are the essence that gives citizens the confidence to give information to the police.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second.

That is why we continue to negotiate with the Home Secretary and David Ford to ensure that, to begin with, the 14 areas of accountability and better process around the NCA — outlined in this document, which was given to me by the Minister through one of his staff — are guaranteed and, where necessary, put into law. That is not dancing on the head of a pin; it is about accountability that leads to citizens and communities having the confidence to give information to the police and other agencies, which is the essence of successfully tackling organised crime.

Mr Allister: Which does the Member think is the greater nicety: organised criminals getting away with their assets unhindered or some sort of super-accountability, over and above the Chief Constable accounting to the Policing Board as to why he relied on the NCA in any given case?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Attwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

It is not super-accountability to have proper accountability, and proper accountability is the way to ensure that the institutions of state have the confidence of the citizens of the state. Through that confidence, we defeat organised crime. The people in south Armagh or in other parts of the North who did not give information to the police about illegal dumping from the South into the North did not do so because, on the one hand, they had the shadow of the organised crime gangs on their backs and, on the other, they did not have confidence as to how the information would be handled.

The issue of the NCA is so important for this simple reason: the high-water mark for police accountability in Northern Ireland ended in 2007. It ended in 2007 in part because of the creation of SOCA, which was brought in to replace the Assets Recovery Agency, which was the most successful body of its sort in Britain and Northern Ireland, and in part because of primacy for national security passing to MI5. The NCA is a super-body. It has super-powers and a super-role. It can have super-capacity to deal with a range of issues.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Attwood: Because of that, we have to ensure that the NCA is subject to the full rigour of accountability and that it is stretched in that respect.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr Attwood: On that, we will hold the line.

Mr Wells: There is a clear dichotomy in the debate between two somewhat entrenched sets of arguments. We hoped that there had been some sort of movement, but obviously there has not.

One view was articulated by Mr McIlveen, Mr Craig and many others and amplified by the Minister, which clearly set out the way in which the legislation and practice had been stretched to the nth degree to try to bring a level of accountability that would get moderate nationalism on board in support of this new body, the NCA. We are told that Keith Bristow has agreed to meet the Policing Board at least once a year — that could be written into statute — and he has given a commitment that he will come before the Policing Board, as is reasonably required of him, to answer questions from the board about the activities of the NCA. We have also been told that the new body will be no less accountable than SOCA. The Minister also made the absolutely crucial point that, in the rest of the United Kingdom, the NCA can instruct the local Chief Constable to take certain actions. Only in Northern Ireland — only in this part of the United Kingdom — is the role reversed and it is the Chief Constable who instructs the NCA. That is an absolutely crucial difference, which seems to have been missed by the SDLP.

I am not remotely surprised that a party that has been up to its neck in organised crime in this part of the United Kingdom for the past 40 years has an incentive to oppose the NCA. We know the stories of the "Slab" Murphys of this world, with hundreds of thousands of pounds of illicit money buried in straw bales, diesel laundering —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: You are telling the truth, Jim.

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the Member about his terminology and language. I am trying to help him, but I warn the Member.

Mr Wells: It is noticeable, Mr Speaker, that not even Sinn Féin dived to Mr Murphy's —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member will know the standard of debate that I expect in the Chamber.

Mr Wells: It was worth a try, Mr Speaker.

We have also been told that the Policing Board will be fully informed and that there will continue to be sharing of information between the NCA and the PSNI. All of those are genuine efforts. Then we heard that individual NCA staff would be accountable to the Police Ombudsman. If that is not a genuine attempt by the Minister and the Chief Constable to meet the opposition from moderate nationalism halfway, what is?

To be honest, one of the issues that I have found frustrating this afternoon is the fact that the word "accountable" has been used so often — sometimes in Irish, many times in English — but at no stage have we had an actual definitive indication of what the SDLP means by accountability, beyond what has been offered. I welcome the fact, and I think that it is progress, that —

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Attwood: I cannot breach confidentiality, but I waved a document that outlines 15 areas on which there might be more accountability or answers to some critical questions. I do not want to crowd into the Minister's space, but, of those 15, my reckoning is that seven or eight have been agreed or agreed in principle by the Home Secretary. The other six or seven have not.

Mr Wells: That is progress. It is good to hear that those negotiations —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. During Mr Attwood's contribution, he threw down a challenge to our party but would not give way to allow us to rise to it. I will try to do that now. I commend the Member for the actions he took as Minister in relation to dumping and for what he did in bringing in SOCA. The reality now, though, is that the actions that your party is currently taking, along with Sinn Féin, will mean that the equivalent of SOCA could not be used to do exactly what it did to help deal with the issue of criminality that was so effectively dealt with when you were Minister.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Humphrey: It is not my place to give way.

Mr Wells: It is actually my place to give way, and I will.

Mr Attwood: I will help the Member with the answer to that question. The problem was that SOCA had not done anything about waste crime and did not even have the biggest waste dump in Northern Ireland on its radar.
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Attwood: What does that say about SOCA?

Mr Wells: I am sorry to interrupt the conversation between Mr Humphrey and Mr Attwood, but I have the Floor.

Mrs Kelly, if you think that quoting the CAJ will get any support amongst unionism, you really are losing the plot. The CAJ is seen as a totally discredited organisation by most unionists, so please do not give us lectures from that group. You stated that we were out of line with other police forces, but I think that Mr Humphrey, in his usual brilliant manner, totally confounded that argument by pointing out just how accountable policing in Northern Ireland already is. It is almost strangling in an ocean of accountability mechanisms, be it the Policing Board, the Justice Committee, the Police Ombudsman, local policing partnerships etc. It goes on and on. There can be no other police service in the world that is as accountable as the PSNI. Therefore to say that we have not already stretched ourselves on that is ridiculous.

Mr Ross Hussey was very supportive of the DUP motion. He also made the point that the NCA annual plan must be agreed by the Minister of Justice. The Minister of Justice is, of course, accountable to this Chamber, and he is here regularly, being questioned, harangued, criticised and, very occasionally, praised. We will have to stamp that out. *[Laughter.]* Certainly, he is accountable. We have the Justice Committee, on which Sinn Féin and the SDLP have strong representation. They can raise issues of concern in that Committee. What more can we do?

5.15 pm

Pat Sheehan talked about interrogation. Of course, he has vast experience of police interrogation and is, therefore, suitably qualified to speak about that. He said that the NCA would bring two-tier policing into Northern Ireland — he called it something like “the North”, but I think he meant Northern Ireland — and that the PSNI should be accountable.

I find myself really worried when I have to agree with every word that Mr Stewart Dickson says. This is a very rare occasion, but I have to say — it grieves me to say it — that he got it absolutely right. Please do not quote me on that in the future. He gave us the graphic depiction of asking our police service to fight organised crime with one hand tied behind its back. That has to be a very accurate analogy for where we are going if we do not support the motion.

Jonathan Craig made the good point that SOCA has gone. We pay tribute to the work of SOCA, which did an excellent job. SOCA has gone, and we are now in this limbo situation where one agency to fight serious crime has been wound up, the NCA is in position and we in Northern Ireland do not have its protection. As Mr Craig rightly pointed out, that is saying that there is an open door to organised crime in this part of the United Kingdom. The major disincentive for organised criminals is to have their assets seized. How many times have we seen situations in Northern Ireland where a drug dealer who has been unemployed for a decade owns four houses, a Ferrari and a villa in Spain but has no way of accounting for where that money came from? The Assets Recovery Agency and then SOCA could seize those assets and say, “Tell us where you got them from. Justify your lifestyle”. At the moment, we do not have that, and the criminals must be rubbing their hands in Northern Ireland and saying that this is the place in which to organise.

Ms Caitríona Ruane raised a series of red herrings about the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and the targets that should be set to deal with sex offences and

cross-border trafficking. That is all very well, but, when you remove the one strong element that is at the disposal of every other police force in the United Kingdom to deal with those issues, you leave the police effectively neutered.

William Humphrey welcomed the conversations between the Home Secretary and the SDLP. We all wish those talks well, and we want them to succeed. However, I want a commitment from the SDLP on this issue: if those talks succeed or succeed to a high level, will the SDLP come back to this House and support the establishment of the NCA in Northern Ireland, even if the less reputable part of nationalism refuses to do so?

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mrs D Kelly: The Member knows full well the SDLP's record on policing reform. He knows that we stepped ahead of all the other nationalist representatives in agreeing to the Patten reforms and joined the Policing Board five years — five whole years — before Sinn Féin.

Mr Wells: I welcome that, and I understand from Mr Attwood that there are 15 points. If you get 11 or 12 of those — you do not often get everything that you want in negotiations — or you get a high degree of agreement on what you want, I hope that you will have the courage of your political convictions to come to the House and say, “We have got as much as we are going to get, and we will support the NCA”. If you do that, there is no way that Sinn Féin can block it, because there will not be a petition of concern. No one else in the House would be mad enough to give Sinn Féin its thirtieth signature, and progress will be made. You will have to act soon because time is running out. The one thing that no one has said this afternoon is that Northern Ireland is not awash with organised crime or that Northern Ireland does not have a problem.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Wells: Therefore, if we all agree that there is a problem, we have to give the police every tool available to stop it.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 49.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr G Kelly and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland,

Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 42; Noes 45.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr McCarthy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 38.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr G Kelly and Mr McKinney.

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's ability to protect life under article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and to tackle serious crime, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking; and will work to ensure that no further delays are allowed to impact on the work of the NCA being extended to Northern Ireland.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Speaker.]

Adjournment

Policing: Larne

Mr Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Business Committee for affording me the opportunity to discuss a topical and vital issue that affects the people of the borough of Larne and further afield: response policing in Larne. The news that emergency response police officers were to be relocated from Larne to Ballymena emerged during the summer. I say “emerged” because I first became aware of the information through social media. Reports subsequently appeared in the local press as further discussion of the rumours occurred.

As early as August, I sought out and met the PSNI area commander for Larne and Ballymena, Chief Inspector John Magill. He confirmed that, under an internal rationalisation programme called Service First, the Larne police response unit would be relocated to Ballymena in the autumn. It was to happen as fast as that. I expressed concern at the proposal, as well as the planned time frame, which would prevent proper discussion of the issue and not allow appropriate planning were the changes to happen. I also highlighted the issue to my colleague Ross Hussey, a member of the Policing Board.

There have been further meetings. At the end of August, Chief Inspector Magill met the Larne policing and community safety partnership (PCSP). Since then, letters of concern have been addressed to the Chief Constable and others. My colleague Councillor Mark McKinty, chairman of the Larne PCSP, wrote to the Chief Constable on 22 July, and again in September. Larne Borough Council did likewise, and wrote to the Minister of Justice. However, I understand that, to date, there has been no response to those concerns, just acknowledgements and holding letters.

At this point, I was going to thank the Minister of Justice for his attendance and express the hope that his summing up would bring some light, clarity and reassurance to my constituents. However, as we can see, he is not in attendance. I believe the reason is that response policing in Larne is an operational matter. The mantra of “That would be an operational matter” seems to trump everything. It is precisely that lack of engagement by and the inflexibility of the hierarchy in the PSNI and Department of Justice that has prompted me to raise this issue in the Assembly to ensure that there is adequate and wider discussion of the matter.

Also, and this is crucial, my Ulster Unionist Party colleagues and representatives from Larne policing and community safety partnership have been contacted by unprecedented numbers of serving police officers who are expressing their concerns, off the record, that the removal of these response police officers from Larne will reduce the effectiveness of policing there.

The proposal will remove 20 response police officers from Larne. In the future, one seventh of their response policing time will be spent sitting in a car travelling between Larne

and Ballymena. How can that be good for policing or for response policing? Local knowledge will be diluted as officers share duties and briefings over a wider area, and that, in my opinion, will leave the community in Larne more vulnerable to criminals. How will the people of Larne receive a timely emergency response during each shift changeover? The travel time between Larne and Ballymena is around 35 minutes, and if the officer is then required to travel on, perhaps to Islandmagee or down the coast, it could take another 25 minutes on top of that. In my mind, that would be unacceptable. In addition, Larne is a major port. What timely response from Ballymena will be possible to a port incident?

What we do know is that the PSNI, as an organisation, is being subjected to significant financial pressure. I say this in passing, but Members who were in this House three and a half years ago will recall that, at the time of the devolution of policing and justice powers, which my party opposed at the time as we had concerns that we highlighted, we were told that there would be a financial package to secure future funding for policing. What has happened to that guarantee, that dividend? It seems to me and many of my constituents that we have seen nothing but cutbacks in policing over the past three years, with rural police stations, such as Glenarm, closing and further centralisation of policing planned. That financial pressure has led to an internal review of operations and a management-consultant-led review, under the Deputy Chief Constable, called Service First. From a Larne perspective, this does not represent “service first”.

The following proposal comes from the Service First strategy. It has not been put into practice, but I understand that it is meant to be enacted at any time. The emergency 999 response officers covering the borough of Larne will parade for duty and be dispatched from Ballymena and not Larne Police Station. If those 20 police officers move to this new centralised response unit, the very close relationship between the 10 neighbourhood officers and their sergeant and inspector, who parade in Larne, will no longer exist. It will cut the current police service based in the town of Larne, and which is fully briefed on local issues, by two thirds.

Budgetary pressures are a major factor behind the rethinking of current policing provision. However, it is essential that any proposed changes are fully thought through and do not endanger public safety or public confidence in policing. To put this into a wider context, response police officers were redeployed from Carrickfergus to Newtownabbey PSNI station some time ago. Again, at critical shift changeover times, officers will not even be available in Carrickfergus to come to assistance in Larne, which may well leave Newtownabbey as the closest alternative location. If a shift overlap is being provided by doubling up on policing time, surely that would be done at considerable cost? That would reduce any theoretical savings that are being projected.

Where is the transparency in this proposal? There has been silence from the Chief Constable and, indeed, the Minister. The net effect of all this will leave a stretch of the heavily populated east Antrim coastal strip without an emergency police response unit. Of course, we will still have our neighbourhood beat officers, but emergency responders will have to travel from Ballymena, which is 22 miles away.

6.00 pm

Some Members might think that Ballymena is well connected to Carrickfergus and Larne. However, I assure them that despite the proposed and, frankly, daft amalgamation with the new mid- and east-Antrim council unit, the transport connections between Ballymena and east Antrim are not good at all. The A26 road over Shanes Hill is notoriously prone to closure in winter weather. I remind Members that, in March this year, the road was closed for several days. At present, Larne and Carrickfergus are located in different policing districts. Why can Larne and Carrickfergus response police not be located together in the east Antrim strip? They could work closely and perhaps garner savings that might be required.

I must also question how the scheduled review of local government has been factored into the proposal. It appears that the police are restructuring ahead of RPA and are failing to take account of it. Carrickfergus, Larne and Ballymena are to come together in a new mid- and east-Antrim council. At present, Carrickfergus response police officers are based in Newtownabbey, which is D district. However, in the future, Carrickfergus will join with Larne and Ballymena, which are in H district. Will Carrickfergus police officers be based in Ballymena in the future, or will we have police officers coming from two different districts into the new council area and being managed from two separate areas? If that is the case, it removes much of what was designed in the new policing structures to increase accountability to local people.

There are very real concerns in the community about the future shape of policing in our district. Although I appreciate that the PSNI response police officers would still spend much of their shift patrolling the Larne area, much of their day would be spent travelling back and forward to Ballymena. During that time, they would not be physically present to assist the people of Larne or to provide reassurance by their physical presence in the town or surrounding area.

A key objective of the current policing plan for Larne is keeping police officers in the Larne area command unit visible and keeping the community informed about local policing issues. One of the key means to achieve that is:

“Continued linking of Neighbourhood Policing through Response Policing officers attached to Larne Area Command Unit”.

It seems very obvious that moving response police officers from Larne to Ballymena is a breach of the Larne district policing plan. It is a breach of the faith of the local community. The Service First plan might be an accountant's dream, but I fear that it could be a police officer's nightmare. As I said earlier, serving police officers are expressing deep concerns.

At present, the recorded crime rates in Larne are relatively low, and public confidence in and support for the Police Service is relatively high. That has always been the case in east Antrim, but public confidence is at stake. We should not take that hard-earned public confidence and support for granted.

I have been advised of an increasing number of incidents where individuals have taken the law into their own hands. Sometimes, victims are too fearful to even report to the police. Those statistics do not even exist. Last Tuesday

and Friday, for instance, homes were attacked in the Antville area. There were reports of concerns about an individual's inappropriate behaviour prior to that. It seems that a second home may well have been attacked by mistake, as it had a similar address. Let me make it clear: taking the law into your own hands is wrong. It creates more victims, and it is creating more criminals. Not only can innocent victims be created, but a guilty party might move on to other communities without their guilt or innocence being determined by our justice system.

I am concerned that the removal of response police officers from Larne will result in reducing the effectiveness of local policing. A vacuum could be created in which paramilitary groups try to establish an increased local role for themselves in the community. We must all respect and rely on the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Public Prosecution Service and our Courts and Tribunals Service. To do otherwise would result in the law of the jungle.

For all the reasons that I have listed, I as an MLA for East Antrim find it unacceptable that Larne response officers are to be removed to Ballymena, some 22 miles away. I accept that there is the operational independence of the Chief Constable, but there are equally important concepts such as public interest, duty of care and public safety. Another buzzword when discussing policing in recent years is accountability. Has the Policing Board been fully briefed? Has it been able to question the Chief Constable and senior officers on Service First? Has this plan been fully thought out? What alternatives have been considered? The failure to respond to numerous letters from Larne Borough Council and the Larne policing and community safety partnership show that there has been a lack of engagement.

In conclusion, I bring this matter to the attention of the Assembly because my constituents in Larne want to have an effective, professional, local police service in their area. It is totally unacceptable that the second largest sea port in Northern Ireland should be left only with a neighbourhood police officer team of 10. The team does work efficiently and effectively, but, if the separation occurs, they would be left without that closer working relationship with the response police officers. I hope that someone in the PSNI, the Department of Justice or the Policing Board is listening and will reconsider this plan, even at this late stage.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the opportunity to take part briefly in this Adjournment debate, and I thank Mr Beggs for securing it. Indeed, I am due at a meeting shortly in the constituency relating to policing in an area that straddles H and D divisions and encompasses some of the same issues that are involved in this evening's debate. I was going to apologise for the fact that I might have to leave early because I do not wish to lessen my own response times, but I do not think that there are a lot of Members to speak, so we might be OK.

Policing performance has become a major issue in our communities, and it is no different in Larne. Indeed, I believe that the town is getting a raw deal under the proposals, and it is evident that public confidence could wane and that the people working at the coalface of policing could struggle to deliver and achieve. It is not only the ordinary folk in the community who are making it known to us even now but people in the service who are expressing their concerns about the potential situation. Those with responsibility must listen and give leadership

on policing, and when it is clear that something is not working, it needs some attention. To that end, I am not sure what we will achieve today in this Chamber as many of the issues and questions have been raised here in the past only for us to be told that these matters are operational and that the Policing Board is the vehicle in which to raise them. There appears to be a wall of reluctance to admit that something will not work and that it perhaps needs fixing. There is a simple reluctance sometimes even to listen.

It is the victims of crime who suffer from the frustration, even now, of poor response times. Larne is no different. It is the same as most of the other areas across the Province, and those people must be listened to. We will have the opportunity at constituency level to relate some of their experiences and give examples locally as we all get to meet the new commander in Larne. Indeed, it was unfortunate that I and other colleagues had to cancel our meeting due to a Committee meeting at the Assembly being rescheduled. So, hopefully, we will get that chance soon and that meeting will take place in the next few days and details of some of our constituents' fears can be used to highlight up the line the variances in response times in the Larne area. The Chief Constable and the senior management team of the PSNI need to take on board the concerns that relate to the potential response times for Larne.

As I said, many of the issues are consistent with other areas, and that is no wonder when you look at the geographical spread of H division, stretching from Islandmagee in the south through Larne, the hill towns, Ballymena, the glens and onwards towards the Causeway area. It is a perfect case study, and it is no coincidence that changes that have taken place recently have raised concerns among constituents. The introduction of limited opening hours and closures of police stations right along the east coast of County Antrim have not left the public in a confident frame of mind on policing. Although the promise of getting more officers out from behind desks and on to the ground is in theory a good idea, at times it has not been seen to do the job. To be honest, it has done nothing to improve the situation. You would want to see some improvement on current response times, but even that has not really happened.

I appreciate the work and efforts of the community officers, but it is when the public demands or needs a service that complaints emerge and constituents indicate their dissatisfaction. I have a list of incidents raised by constituents. There was a particularly worrying one recently, when a person who had been visited previously and whose details were in the hands of dissident republicans found it difficult, even at this stage, to get a response from the police, and she became quite worried about the developing situation. I do understand that the police have to take their time in assessing situations before they move in, but hopefully a balance can be struck in that area. I understand that the PSNI has to be forewarned of a situation before it goes in, but we need to bear in mind the needs of the victims as well.

Great emphasis is placed nowadays on district and area policing plans, the need for local consultation, local input and local accountability in matters such as response policing. However, in my experience, rather than enhancing that position, the new local policing and

community safety partnerships have a lesser input, with many issues being deemed operational, as Mr Beggs said, and beyond discussion and accountability. The PCSPs, of course, replaced the district policing partnerships, which jointly worked with the PSNI. I think there are maybe two or three former chairmen of the old DPPs in the Chamber this evening. They were involved in a step-by-step process, with areas of concern, such as response policing, being given priority if and when required. Maybe there should be a further look at the role of PCSPs and their involvement in scrutiny and local consultation, and how that could be enhanced, instead of using the operational brush to sweep matters beyond their reach.

Finally, I return to the source of concern that has been expressed to me. It is not just constituents who are anticipating a poor service or, potentially, a bad experience; it comes from those who are working tirelessly in H division to provide the quality service to the public.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support this discussion on the response teams in Larne. I have been very prominent on that matter for months, since it first came to my attention that the response team based in Larne was getting moved. One thing that has not been mentioned tonight is that not only is the response team getting moved to Ballymena but we will be covered in east Antrim by Ballymena and Coleraine. So if Ballymena is not available, Coleraine will come in, which is further away again. It is between 40 and 50 miles away.

I wrote to the Chief Constable asking for a meeting on that matter, and I got referred to the head of H district, Brian Kee. We had a very cordial meeting in Ballymena, but one of the things that he said, which relates to something that Mr Beggs said, was that now we will have response teams sitting in lay-bys, something like the Ambulance Service. I said that I hope we do not go down the road of the programme that the Ambulance Service introduced a few years ago of siting its vehicles where they could get to an emergency quicker, which did not prove to be successful. Then, the gentleman retracted what he said, but that is what they are doing. He said that they have to reconstruct their plans because of a lack of funding. He blamed the lack of funding, in some ways, on the flags issue, the parading issue and all the money that has been spent there. In that sense, there is a lot of ground here for talking. I believe that we need a united voice here and to sit down and talk to everybody about that matter.

6.15 pm

I support policing, but I do not support bad policing. This is bad policing, because it is bad management. It is leaving the area vulnerable. Look at the glens, for example. We saw what happened last year in Glenarm, when 20 or 25 hooded men took over — I mean took over — the whole centre of Glenarm village. They walked about quite freely, damaging a car and attacking its occupants. That was done over a period of half an hour or more, without any response at all, even though the police were called. At the minute in Larne, hooded men are using stun guns to put their victims down. This is happening in daylight. They then attack them with iron bars, bats, sticks and all. Where is the CCTV in the middle of Larne? Nobody has been charged, and nobody has been identified through CCTV.

Just three weeks ago, the police visited the house of two young men to tell them that there was a viable threat to

their lives. A week prior to that, their houses had been smashed up, again by hooded men. This is an ongoing thing in Larne. I have a list of 20 to 30 guns that have been stolen in Larne. Not one of them has been returned, not one of them has been found, and I cannot get an answer to that. I do not know whether those are service-issued weapons, but the list is there. The police have identified them and told me that those were the ones that were stolen. However, none has been returned. Those are the kinds of things that are going on in Larne.

One Member said that the crime rate in Larne is low. In a way, I agree with that, but I also do not agree with it. It may be low — I agree with your point — but people are scared of coming forward with information. They are coming to me. I have information the length of my arm, and I have given it to the police. I have given them names, I have given them locations, and I have given them incidents and everything. They even have a taped conversation of an alleged crime, but they told me that they cannot touch it unless they have definite information. So, tell me how the confidential phone number works. This is part of the problem. The issue is building confidence in the community. While they are moving the services out, all those young policemen are coming through and automatically want to go into response teams. Those young men should be put into community policing. That is where they will learn their trade. It is like serving your time. So, they should be put in as community policemen.

There seems to be a situation growing where there are two types of policemen: community and response. There is only one type, and there should not be that demarcation line. Larne is too big to move these services out, but it is big enough to have a response team. I agree with the Member that that response team could be merged with the team in Carrickfergus. I do not know whether that is the answer, but I agree that there should be something like that. Moving it to Ballymena, however, and then relying on the team from Coleraine to come in on the back of the Ballymena team if it is elsewhere is not good policing. We talk about policing, and the main issue is to put confidence back into the community so that people can lift the phone, make a call and report a crime or whatever. That is confidence, but, at the present time, it is not working in Larne. Believe me, I am in Larne quite often, and I can tell you that more and more people come to me with these problems. Not that long ago, six men walked into a premises and came back out with hoods on. They got into a car, committed a crime, came back again and got out. Again, that all happened during the day. The police know about that. Last year or the year before, the police escorted a crowd — a mob — from Craig Hill right down at about 11.45 pm and said that it was legal, because their human rights meant that they could not stop them.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr McMullan: Police chiefs in England could not understand that happening.

I thank the Member for tabling the topic. The response team should not be moved out of Larne, and I agree with possible amalgamation with Carrick. I hope that Members take it on board that there needs to be a united voice from every Member of every party in the constituency that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet on policing in East Antrim.

Mr Dickson: I start by thanking my colleague from East Antrim Mr Beggs for bringing the debate to the House. It is an important debate, and it is one that many of us in the Chamber have had before, whether away back when Whitehead police station was being closed or when the changes to arrangements in Carrickfergus were being made and the ultimate decision was taken to move policing to Newtownabbey and leave neighbourhood policing in Carrickfergus. We see a repetition of that emerging in Larne, but I think that the Larne situation is more serious. Although I have critical concerns about the changes between Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey, they at least appear to be reasonably well managed on the ground. There is not a great deal of public concern about those changes, although I still have my concerns and fears. However, because of the much wider geographical stretch between Larne, Ballymena and the boundaries for H district, it can and will have a much more significant impact.

This is the second time today that I have said this, but it is not for us in the Assembly to micromanage any organisation. It is right and proper, however, that we express our concerns about the way in which operational decisions are taken, and it is right that we put those concerns to the relevant authorities. In this case, those are the Policing Board and the Chief Constable and his management team on the ground. It is for them to take on board the observations that we make, and, ultimately, it is for the public, through the policing and community safety partnerships, to make their views known as well.

Mr Beggs was right when he said that this is emerging. There has been no great detailed information delivered by the PSNI on the changes. Indeed, a number of changes have been taking place. I do not know whether other Members will concur, but we find out about many of the changes that take place, whether it is the change at chief inspector level or the change in Ballymena and Larne, rather than be given direct, up-front information about them.

When it comes to tasking arrangements between Ballymena and Larne, there should be no gap. It is also important that we understand the changes that the police are making. I have no doubts that if they were here or we were in a meeting with them, we would understand why they are making some of those changes. However, it is important that they do not do anything that increases the fear of crime, because that leads to misinformation in the community. We, too, have a responsibility as political leaders not to undermine confidence in policing by creating unnecessary fear. The best way in which that can be dealt with is by the police talking to us and by us talking to the police. In fact, Mr McMullan made a very important point, which was simply this: if this Adjournment debate is to mean anything at all, the Members representing East Antrim in the Assembly should get together and meet the appropriate policing authorities to thrash the issue out in order for us to get answers. I am sure that the police would be able to convince us of the thinking behind some of their actions, and equally we would be in a position to express our concerns to them. I am not throwing out a challenge, but I am suggesting that the Members for East Antrim get together and have that meeting with the senior police team responsible for each district.

That brings me on to the whole relationship between D district and H district. Sir Hugh Orde, when he was Chief

Constable, made many good decisions, but he rather jumped the gun when he decided that he was going to reorganise the police to match what was then the perceived layout of local government in Northern Ireland. Rightly or wrongly, he did that. That is how we ended up with seven districts plus Belfast. We now need to hear the thinking of the Chief Constable and the Policing Board on how they intend to relate to the new local government boundaries. All the Members here have made it clear that any reasonable person would say that, if you are policing from the city boundary between Newtownabbey and the glens of Antrim and inland as far as Ballymena, there has to be a very different policing model and placement of staff and resources from what we have, with two boundaries between D district and H district. I call on the Policing Board and the senior management team of the PSNI to come to us urgently to explain how they intend to deliver a modern, efficient policing service between the boundaries of the old D and H districts — between the boundaries of Carrickfergus, Larne and Ballymena, so that they can deliver a modern and efficient policing service that reduces fear of crime, has its vehicles in the right place and uses the appropriate technologies. I really cannot see the necessity for all police officers to go to Ballymena to be briefed or tasked with the jobs that they do. Much of that could be done using existing stations or the appropriate computer and other networks that they have.

We also need to bear it in mind that Larne is a port town. There is a very small port police service inside the boundary fence of the port of Larne. Nevertheless, the port is where the town of Larne connects with the wider world through ports in Scotland. To that end, it is also important that policing in the town reflects the potential risks that there are with being a port town.

I will leave the debate with one thought. Everybody has referred to the time that it could and does take a police car to travel from one part of the district to another if these changes are made in full. One of my colleagues, a Larne councillor, told me last week to compare the 20-odd minutes that it may take a police car with the six minutes that it takes for the inshore lifeboat to be tasked in Larne to save lives.

Mr Hussey: I am sure that some of my colleagues are wondering why somebody from west Tyrone is sitting here for an Adjournment debate that relates to the town of Larne. When my colleague Roy Beggs mentioned that the debate was taking place tonight, I felt that I had to be here as a member of the Policing Board and as someone who has worked in the area. In a previous life, when I had a real job, I worked as a manager for Pearl Assurance and was responsible for an area from Londonderry to Larne, so I know the area very well. In fact, when the seven oaks became one oak, I was passing the Ballygally Castle Hotel — I had never seen so much water in all my life — so I know what it is like to travel in that area. For me, it does not make sense to move the response team from Larne to Ballymena. I have travelled that road many times, and I do not know how anyone could do it in any reasonable time. The road is not good. A police officer attempting to travel it at speed will be taking their life in their hands.

Larne is a large town. It has a port, and that is my major concern. We talked about various issues in the earlier debate on the National Crime Agency. A port is one of the places about which you would have major concerns.

For that reason alone, Larne should be considered for the retention of its police force.

I was disappointed to hear my colleague say that the chair of the PCSP, Councillor McKinty, had received no response from senior police officers or the Chief Constable. I intend to copy the Hansard report of the debate to the Chief Constable. I can assure Members that I will do all in my power to make sure that the Chief Constable is aware of the concerns of the residents and elected representatives of Larne.

6.30 pm

As you know, my background also includes quite a long time as a part-time police officer. I know what it is to be a community police officer. I know what it is to know your neighbours and to work well with your neighbours. I have seen the problems of restricted policing in my area, where rural police stations are being closed. However, by no stretch of the imagination could you describe Larne police station as rural. There is no logic in moving 20 officers to Ballymena; it does not make sense. If we went further, perhaps sending officers from Coleraine to Larne, I would not want to be the person at the other end of the phone, waiting for a response.

Reference was made to last year's foul weather, when the snow came in and no one got out. How, in the name of all that is wonderful, could you expect a police officer to get from Ballymena down the glens or from Ballymena to Larne in those circumstances? It just cannot happen. Therefore, I am fully supportive of what other Members have said. Computerisation is a wonderful thing, but it will not replace the police officer on the beat and it will not inspire community confidence. I am very concerned about some of the comments that have been made this evening. Larne is a principal port of Northern Ireland. Yes, we have Belfast, but Larne brings in an awful lot of business and traffic. With that, perhaps, problems sometimes come. If we do not look at those problems or say that it is really not that big an issue, we could miss the main event.

I am happy to support the Members who are here tonight. I thank my colleague for bringing the issue to the Assembly. As I said, my promise, as a member of the Policing Board, is that, with your permission, Mr Speaker, I will send a copy of the relevant Hansard to the Chief Constable. I will follow that up, because I believe that you should have the support of Policing Board members on the issue.

Adjourned at 6.31 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 21 October 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin replace Ms Sue Ramsey as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. — [Ms Ruane.]

Ministerial Statements

Public Expenditure: 2013-14 October Monitoring Round and 2014-15 Capital Reallocation Exercise

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to present the Executive's conclusions on the October monitoring allocations for 2013-14 and the capital reallocations for 2014-15.

Before I get into the detail, I first wish to present some information that sets the wider economic context for those public expenditure allocations. I do so because this stage in the financial year is an opportune time to take stock of the key economic and financial indicators. Indeed, it is my intention in future years to use the opportunity that the October monitoring round presents halfway through the budgetary year to update the House and the wider public on the economic and fiscal position in Northern Ireland by way of a mid-year financial statement.

When making Budget allocations, I believe that it is important to factor in the strategic positioning of our economy, thereby allowing an assessment of which sectors are currently in most need of assistance. It will be useful to set out for all Members what I believe the current position to be, as it will help develop a better understanding of my announcements today and of the key issues that we will have to address in the coming months as part of the 2015-16 Budget process.

Looking at the economy first, it is clear that many key indicators are showing positive trends and that the local economy has shown signs of improvement since the turn of 2013. The labour market is improving, with the number of people claiming unemployment benefits falling for seven consecutive months. This is the first time that we have witnessed such a prolonged reduction in unemployment benefit claimants since August 2007. The unemployment rate has also fallen to 7·3%, which is 0·4 percentage points below the UK rate and significantly below the rates in the Republic of Ireland and the eurozone, which are at 13·5% and 12·1% respectively.

The lower unemployment figures are also reflected in the employment trend, with an additional 4,000 people now in employment compared to the same time last year. However, this is no time to become complacent, since the number of people who are in employment reduced over the past quarter, which indicates that the recovery is by no means secure.

There are also signs of increased activity in the housing market. The latest residential property price index produced by Land and Property Services for quarter 2 of 2013 shows that residential property prices increased by 2% compared to quarter 1. Property sales were also up by an encouraging 10% compared with a year before, which is another positive indicator. However, the housing market recovery is in its early phase, with house prices still more than 50% below their 2007 peak.

Private sector activity is also picking up, with the latest Ulster Bank purchasing managers' index (PMI) recording a further rise in private sector business activity such as new orders, employment and exports across all sectors — including retail, manufacturing and construction — during September, extending the current sequence of growth to three consecutive months.

The latest PMI data also pointed to a fourth successive increase in new business for Northern Ireland companies, with private sector firms increasing their staffing levels for the third successive month. The fastest rises were seen in retail and construction companies, the two sectors which, we all know, have endured a lot during the downturn. This economic recovery is also reflected in local tourism numbers. Quarterly figures show that, over the year to March 2013, external visitor numbers were up by 4% and associated tourism expenditure was also up by 10%.

The readout from the recent international investment conference is also very positive. The growing number of job announcements made by Invest Northern Ireland show that Northern Ireland has the core requirements needed for growing a competitive private sector. This was also reflected in the recent UK Trade and Investment report, which highlighted that in 2012-13 Northern Ireland achieved an increase in new investment projects of 41% compared with the year before. We are the second most attractive destination for foreign direct investment per head of population in the whole of the United Kingdom, second only to London. Investments in our telecommunications infrastructure are fast making Northern Ireland, and Belfast in particular, an international capital for information and communication technology financial services transactions.

Unfortunately, growing that competitive and dynamic sector of the economy will have to happen in parallel with the Executive working to address some structural economic constraints. Northern Ireland's gross value added (GVA), which is a measure of the whole economy, stands at £29,870 million for 2011, representing £16,531 for every head of the population. This is 79.2% of the UK average, although it is up from 78.7% in 2010.

Recent data shows that this region is still heavily dependent on fiscal transfers from the national economy, with a net subvention figure of £5,850 per capita in 2010-11, which is more than double the equivalent figure for the UK as a whole. Although our overall net fiscal deficit of £10.5 billion, or 38% of GVA, is down from its 2009-2010 peak of £10.8 billion, it is transparently obvious to all except those who do not wish to see that this region remains reliant on the rest of the United Kingdom for a significant amount of our public spending.

Growing the private sector will increase the regional tax base, which will help to address that fiscal deficit. The other side of the fiscal deficit question is the level of public expenditure that is made available to Northern Ireland. In

that regard we, too, benefit from our place in the United Kingdom. The total identifiable expenditure on services in 2011-12 shows Northern Ireland's per head spending at £10,782, which is higher than the UK average and the other two devolved regions.

The public expenditure outlook is undoubtedly challenging, but it also provides me, as Finance Minister, with opportunities to promote economic growth and improve how we deliver public services. I believe that there is significant scope to drive forward reform and promote innovation in our public sector. My recent discussions with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted a number of areas such as collaborative procurement, widening shared services functions to embrace the wider public sector and local authorities, and engineering genuine governance reform. Those are issues that we need to pursue if we want to have lean and efficient delivery of public services to a standard that benchmarks well against international best practice. I intend to make an announcement about how we can progress that in the weeks ahead.

The UK spending review announcement in June confirmed that our 2015-16 resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) would increase by 0.6% in cash terms, while total capital DEL would increase by 3.3% in cash terms. The change in emphasis by the United Kingdom Government whereby current spend is constrained to fund capital investment is perfectly understandable if, perhaps, challenging. Capital investment adds to the long-term economic capacity of an economy by improving competitiveness and generating positive returns. That, I think, presents us in Northern Ireland with an opportunity to genuinely focus policy attention on growing our economy not by paying lip service to that aim but by making tangible investments in our economic future.

While the UK Government continue to afford budgetary protection to schools and health, Northern Ireland will benefit because we have full comparability under the Barnett formula. Therefore, the Northern Ireland block is relatively protected. However, as I said earlier, the resource budget side will continue to be constrained, with the latest Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts suggesting that resource DEL at a UK level will decrease by 10.4% in real terms by 2017-18.

We will, therefore, have to consider carefully how we can continue to provide high-priority public services at a level that is acceptable to the public. Note that I said "high-priority public services", because we will undoubtedly have to stop doing some things that we are doing. The critical task will be to ensure that Departments deliver only the core functions that the public need and the outcomes that people desire. Spending on services that do not produce results is simply a waste of money that we do not have to squander. That will automatically force Departments to consider an efficiency agenda. To some, efficiency is the same as cuts, but not to me. Although that may involve reductions to low-priority services, for me efficiency is really about delivering key quality services with the minimum necessary level of inputs and obtaining outcomes.

The benefit of having our resource budget envelope constrained in that way is that we, as an Executive, have relatively high amounts of capital to invest in our economic future. In particular, a large tranche of the capital received

from Her Majesty's Government is what is known as financial transactions capital, which has to go — as loans and equity investment — directly to private sector entities. That is a positive development because, of necessity, it requires the Government to partner with the private sector to invest in our infrastructure and it requires the private sector to produce innovative investment opportunities. That will assist in growing our private sector capacity. Furthermore, that need to engage with our private sector in enhancing our capital stock will increase over the coming years as the UK Government are likely to make ever greater use of financial transactions capital.

Having set the scene, I want to turn, first, to the October Monitoring round and then to the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise. As usual, the Executive's focus in the monitoring rounds is on the non-ring-fenced resource DEL. The non-cash ring-fenced resource DEL element is handled separately since it is strictly controlled by Her Majesty's Treasury and cannot be used for any other purpose.

The starting point for this monitoring round was the June Monitoring outcome, which resulted in an overcommitment on the resource DEL side of £16.8 million and an effective overcommitment on the capital investment side of £10.5 million. That capital overcommitment included a pre-commitment to fund the £17 million purchase of the Invest NI headquarters, which has now concluded.

There were also three centre items, which impacted on the funding available in this round. The first was the regional rate income, with the latest forecast suggesting that income in this financial year is £4 million below the level included in the budget position. That is entirely due to lower than expected increases in both the domestic and non-domestic tax bases.

Members will also recall that, in the June monitoring round, the Executive agreed to an amended asset management unit capital receipts profile. That new profile allocated £19.4 million of additional capital receipts to Departments in this financial year, which is some £5.6 million less than the original target of £25 million. That, therefore, left a capital DEL pressure to be addressed in this monitoring round.

12.15 pm

The latest position on the Delivering Social Change projects and childcare strategy also had an impact on the funding position. There were a number of resource DEL transfers under the Delivering Social Change banner processed in the October monitoring round and those included £2 million to the Department of Education; £0.8 million to the Department for Employment and Learning; £0.33 million to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM); and £0.04 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). Since that funding is accessed from the social investment fund set aside by the Executive for this purpose, those transactions were handled as technical transfers rather than allocations.

OFMDFM has confirmed that £15 million of capital DEL held at the centre will not be required in this financial year, and this was, therefore, made available for allocation in this monitoring round. The Department has further indicated that all of the residual resource DEL funding in respect of both the social investment fund and childcare strategy — some £4.8 million — is likely to be utilised in

this financial year. I will provide a further update on that in January.

Of course, there were also reduced requirements surrendered by the Departments in this monitoring round. These amounted to £42.7 million resource expenditure and £31.1 million capital investment. Full details are provided in the tables accompanying this statement.

It is good practice that Departments seek to manage any emerging pressures within their existing allocations before bringing forward bids for additional allocations. The public expenditure control framework stipulates that internal departmental movements across spending areas in excess of the de minimis threshold require the Executive's approval. The movements agreed by the Executive in this round are also detailed in the tables.

Departments may also, for a number of reasons, seek to reclassify expenditure from resource to capital or vice versa. All such reclassifications need Executive approval, and these are also shown in the tables provided with the statement. Furthermore, Departments may also, subject to Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) approval, seek to move budgets between the ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced resource DEL categories. The impact of those moves is shown in the table detailing the ring-fenced resource DEL position. All those issues impacted on the total amount of resources available to the Executive in this monitoring round. Once those were all taken into account, the Executive had £24.1 million resource DEL and £28.7 million of capital DEL available for allocation.

Against the funding available, Departments submitted bids totalling £152 million in respect of resource expenditure and £72.7 million in respect of capital expenditure. The individual bids are also included in the tables attached to the statement. The level of allocations made by the Executive was informed by a judgement on the level of overcommitment that should be carried forward to the January monitoring round and the quality of bids submitted.

The Executive agreed allocations totalling £43.5 million on the resource side and £36.8 million on the capital side. The individual allocations are detailed in the tables, and I will, therefore, highlight only some of the main ones here.

There was £41.2 million allocated to the Department for Regional Development (DRD). That allocation included an additional £15 million towards roads structural maintenance; a further £5 million towards other road improvements; and £1.5 million towards the Magherafelt bypass project. It will also allow DRD to address a pressure of £2 million in regard to land compensation costs and fund a £1.7 million loan to Londonderry Port, which will enable the port to carry out improvements having secured an investment in an £80 million renewable power station. It will also provide £6 million for street lighting renewal works and safety testing. Finally, it includes the residual £10 million towards the DRD budget shortfall in relation to the release of value from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

The Executive also agreed to provide £14 million to DHSSPS, reflecting the high priority that the Executive continues to attach to the provision of quality healthcare. I am very pleased that this allocation will allow our hospitals to address thousands of elective care pressures in a range of specialties and seek to reduce waiting lists.

There was also £6.3 million allocated to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). That provides £5 million towards addressing a pressure in respect of TB compensation. It also allows DARD to fund an additional pressure of £1.3 million in respect of the hardship funding provided for in the June monitoring round.

There was also £5 million to the Department for Social Development (DSD) to fund additional investment in the co-ownership scheme, which remains oversubscribed. That will assist a further 100 first-time buyers and provide a further stimulus for the local housing market.

The allocations made in this monitoring round were skewed heavily towards improving our roads and transport infrastructure. That will reap economic returns in the long term and provide a short-term boost for our construction sector.

Before turning to the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise, I would like to update Members on the latest position in respect of financial transaction capital funding. Members will recall that in June monitoring, the Executive allocated £10 million to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) for the agrifood loan scheme. That scheme has now been announced. Further funding may be utilised in the last quarter of this financial year if demand exceeds the initial allocation.

I can now also announce that the Executive have allocated £5 million for the DSD affordable homes loan fund and £3.7 million towards the empty homes loan scheme. That still leaves some £20.9 million of residual financial transactions capital available in this financial year. My officials have been in discussion with Her Majesty's Treasury on potential end-of-year flexibility in respect of the financial transactions capital. Indications are that some limited flexibility may well be available, although that has not yet been confirmed by Treasury Ministers. I will update colleagues on that issue and any further allocations at January monitoring.

October monitoring concluded with an overcommitment of £19.4 million of resource expenditure and £8 million of capital expenditure. I believe that that is perfectly manageable at this stage of the financial year.

I will now turn to the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise. The capital reallocation exercise was commissioned by my officials over the summer. Its aim was to reallocate funding that was likely to be available in 2014-15 following delay in major projects such as the A5 road scheme. That reflects the critical importance that I attach to sound strategic capital budget planning. We need to make the most of our scarce resources. That exercise will help us to achieve that.

Before I detail the 2014-15 capital allocations that have been agreed by the Executive, I will touch briefly on some of the key funding assumptions that shaped the indicative financial envelope that is available for disposal. The starting position was the existing capital DEL overcommitment for 2014-15 of £18.5 million. The Executive also face a significant overcommitment on the resource DEL side next year. I will say more about that later. To help to address that resource DEL overcommitment, the Executive agreed to reverse a previous resource-to-capital switch of £6 million next year. Two Departments also identified easements. They were £115 million from DRD due to delay in the A5 road project and £7.8 million from DARD in respect of its headquarters

relocation project. That funding will be surrendered as part of next year's June monitoring round.

An additional £50 million of spending power also arose from the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) borrowing reprofiling that was previously agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury. A further £6 million was freed up from the Department of Education baseline as a result of a successful United Community bid in 2014-15. The Department of Justice (DOJ) also previously agreed to surrender £10 million of capital funding in 2014-15. There will also most likely be some carry-forward of capital investment from this year and into the next. For planning purposes, that is expected to be some £10 million, which is broadly in line with the experience in the past few years.

Against those additional pressures, there was also a capital DEL pressure of £23.9 million in 2014-15 following the Executive's decision in June monitoring to retain a number of income-generating assets that were previously earmarked for disposal in 2014-15. Of course, the retention of those assets will benefit the resource side next year and beyond. Finally, the Executive were due to receive £25 million in 2014-15 in respect of the A5 road scheme from the ROI Government. However, due to the ongoing delay to that project, it is not yet certain that that receipt will materialise in 2014. I will discuss that issue with my counterpart in Dublin in the near future.

All of those planning assumptions provided the Executive with an indicative capital funding envelope of £125.5 million. However, that was without any overcommitment. The Executive agreed that, based on previous years' underspends, we would overcommit by around £40 million. That would then increase significantly the funding that is available.

Departments submitted 2014-15 capital bids worth £502.6 million. A summary of all of those bids is included in the tables that are attached to the statement. It was clearly not possible to meet all bids that were submitted. The Executive attached highest priority to discrete infrastructure projects that could deliver considerable spend in 2014-15. Such projects not only improve our infrastructure and contribute to long-term economic growth, but provide an immediate boost to the local construction sector. The capital allocations are detailed in tables. I will highlight the most significant ones.

The Executive allocated £75.2 million to DRD. In terms of road infrastructure, that will allow DRD to continue the construction of the A8 Belfast to Larne road scheme and commence work on the much-needed A31 Magherafelt bypass project. I am extremely pleased to announce an allocation of £8.1 million in 2014-15 that will allow the commencement of work on the A26 Glarryford road scheme, where an additional eight kilometres of dual carriageway will be built, improving access and road safety on that key route. Furthermore, the funding will help DRD to deliver planned road structural maintenance and other road improvements. It will also ensure that DRD can complete bus procurement orders initiated in 2013-14 and begin replacement of, I am happy to say, the Strangford to Portaferry and Rathlin ferries.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hamilton: A very popular one.

DRD will also commence early design and preparatory work for the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson road scheme. Importantly, the A6 preparatory work does not commit the Executive contractually to that project. The Executive took the view that, until there is clarity on the A5 project, we cannot afford to commit contractually to the A6 project, since delivering both in parallel is unaffordable without there being a serious detrimental impact on all other departmental capital budgets.

The Executive also agreed to allocate £33 million to the Department of Health. Two weeks ago, I accepted an invitation from the Health Minister to visit the children's hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. I was shocked by what I saw: dedicated health professionals going beyond the call of duty to treat some extremely ill children but doing so in surroundings that, I am ashamed to say, are far from fit for purpose. Therefore, I am immensely pleased that that allocation enables the Department to begin construction on a new children's hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital site in Belfast.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hamilton: It will be a new state-of-the-art regional hospital to care for sick children from all over Northern Ireland.

The allocation allows the Department to manage health and safety risks proactively throughout the health estate and progress other estate improvements. It also provides the DHSSPS with additional funding to take forward a number of capital projects under the Transforming Your Care (TYC) reform programme and the construction of a new bespoke logistics and support centre for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin]
in the Chair)*

There was also £19.9 million allocated to DARD. That provides additional funding for axis 1 and axis 3 of the Northern Ireland rural development programme, which offers capital funding to farmers for areas such as improved competitiveness and greater access to high-speed broadband services in rural areas. The allocation also provides funding for further flood alleviation works in east Belfast and Beragh. There is also funding to support the aims and objectives of the Agri-Food Strategy Board's recently published Going for Growth strategy and to provide an upgrade to three areas of the facilities at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute's Hillsborough and Stormont sites.

There is also £16.1 million to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to address a significant pressure next year for the regional stadium construction programme.

A total of £11.8 million was allocated to the Department for Employment and Learning. That will fund a new faculty block at the University of Ulster in Coleraine; redevelopment at Queen's University; essential asbestos removal at Stranmillis University College; and a newbuild further education college in Banbridge.

The Department of the Environment (DOE) will receive £3 million for heritage-led development, on top of the £1.1 million that it will receive for the same in the October monitoring round. Members may recall that I brought a motion to the Assembly earlier this year acknowledging the

economic value of Northern Ireland's outstanding historic buildings, so I am pleased that that allocation will see assets such as Carrickfergus Castle and Dundrum Castle enhanced.

In total, the Executive agreed allocations of £177 million, resulting in an indicative capital overcommitment of £51.6 million in 2014-15. Although very challenging, I believe that that should be manageable through the in-year process. However, it will most likely mean that there will be little capital funding available for allocation through the monitoring rounds next year. I view that as a positive development, since it reflects the fact that the Executive have now taken a more strategic approach to capital budget planning.

Before I conclude my statement, I take this opportunity to update the House on United Community projects and the 2014-15 financial transactions allocations. Members will be aware that, as part of the economic pact, the Executive secured additional borrowing power of £50 million in 2014-15 and 2015-16 for shared housing and education projects. I can confirm today that the Lisanelly project, involving a shared school site in Omagh, will be funded from that additional borrowing power to the amounts of £6 million in 2014-15 and £9 million 2015-16.

My officials continue to work with the Departments and Her Majesty's Treasury on identifying further projects that may benefit from that additional funding source.

12.30 pm

The Executive have £59.3 million of financial transactions capital available in 2014-15 and £104.3 million in 2015-16. As part of the capital exercise, Departments submitted bids totaling £68.9 million for 2014-15, and those are shown in the tables attached to this statement. The bids submitted generally appeared perfectly viable, although with some uncertainty around the amount of funding required. That is because the schemes are generally demand-led, and actual funding requirements, and the exact timing of them, will only be known when the schemes are fully operational. Therefore, the Executive agreed initial allocations to those schemes that were considered viable at this time, with a commitment to consider the position again in June next year.

Three financial transactions allocations were agreed by the Executive at this time. The first was £10 million to DETI for the agrifood loan scheme in the 2014-15 financial year. The second allocation was £13 million to DSD to advance two further housing schemes, including an affordable homes loan scheme and an empty homes scheme. Both those schemes will boost housing market supply and assist hard-pressed first-time buyers. Finally, the Executive agreed to allocate £5 million to DHSSPS to take forward loan schemes for improvements and equipment purchase by GPs and dentists. Those allocations mean that there is still £31.3 million of financial transactions funding available next year, and that can then be allocated to those schemes that experience high demand or, indeed, alternative schemes that may materialise at that time.

The allocations of £177 million resulted in an indicative 2014-15 capital overcommitment of £51.6 million. That includes the £6 million capital DEL to resource DEL switch, which will result in a 2014-15 resource DEL overcommitment of £94.5 million. Addressing those

overcommitments will be a significant challenge for the Executive next year.

The allocations that I have announced today will leave a lasting economic impact on Northern Ireland and help our economy as the recovery gathers momentum. One of the real benefits of our budget reallocation process is that we can use easements in some Departments to fund good projects that will deliver an economic return in the long term. The gathering economic recovery that I spoke of earlier will be further supported by investment in our roads and public transport network of some £91 million across this year and next year. I have also announced some £12 million of additional investment in our further education and higher education estates, and that will improve facilities for students here. Those investments will not only provide extra construction jobs in the short term but support long-term economic growth. Our health sector has also received a significant boost this year and, in particular, with the additional capital investments next year. A key project to highlight is the new children's hospital, which will commence next year and, when completed, will offer a modern care environment for children in Northern Ireland. All sides of this Assembly have called for that project, and I am more than happy to give it the green light today. There is also a much-needed boost for our farming and agrifood sector, with an additional £15 million for the rural development programme and Agri-Food Strategy Board, and a further £10 million of financial transactions funding committed to the agrifood loan scheme for next year.

In short, the allocations that I have announced today for this year and next will sustain and create jobs. They will aid our recovery. They will develop our infrastructure and give us a competitive edge. They will generate opportunities for all, and they will provide help for the vulnerable. I am determined to play my part in supporting economic recovery across Northern Ireland, and I strongly believe that the allocations announced today will do just that. I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will call Daithí McKay, the Chair of the Finance Committee, next and give some latitude to you, as the Chair. However, this statement has attracted considerable interest amongst the Members present, and I have a significant list of Members who wish to speak. I appeal at the start for Members to come straight to the point in their questions, and that will allow everyone to get in.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I will take full advantage of your latitude this afternoon. I thank the Minister for his statement, and may I be the first to welcome the fact that the Executive have agreed to fund the A26 to the tune of £8.1 million. That is long overdue, and I am sure that all Members from North Antrim and elsewhere will agree with me on that. The increase in capital is good for construction and it will be good for growth, which also has to be welcomed.

The October monitoring round is obviously important to ensuring that the Executive remain within the Budget exchange scheme limits and that we avoid a situation in which we return money across the water. How confident are you that Departments will not declare further significant reduced requirements in the January

monitoring round, when there will be less opportunity for reallocations?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Chair for his question and his welcome for the commitment to capital in the October monitoring statement and the reallocation exercise for 2014-15.

How confident am I about Departments not declaring returns through reduced requirements in January? We have to expect some, because pressures will develop over the year, which mean that Departments simply cannot deliver on the allocations that they have been given in the Budget. Sometimes, because of a variety of circumstances, they cannot deliver on some of the allocations that they have been given in monitoring rounds.

The lesson of the past number of years is that Departments are much better at managing their budgets as a result of the pressure that local Ministers, Committees and the Assembly are putting on them and the pressure that the scrutiny that we get from outside this place puts on them. As a result, since 2010, when end-year flexibility was replaced by the Budget exchange scheme, we have not sent a single penny back to Treasury. That is something to be welcomed. Our more prudent and sensible fiscal management over that time is something that we should be warmly welcoming because it means that we are able to retain that money here to invest in the sort of services and capital projects that I outlined in the statement.

Mr Campbell: I join in welcoming the Minister's statement. What will the financial impact on the economy be, particularly with regard to the roads infrastructure projects to the north-west, including the A26 to the north coast and the A6 from the M2?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He was one of the first to lobby me about the A26 when I came into post. My backside had barely hit the seat when an invitation to visit his part of the world hit my desk. I was very pleased to visit Coleraine. One of the events that we held was a meeting with a local haulier, who pointed out to us the detrimental effect of the slowness of the A26 on his business. He said that if more of that road could be dualled, it would be a great boost to his business. It is not just his business that would benefit; there are other businesses, including manufacturing businesses, in the north coast, east Londonderry and north Antrim areas that would benefit from it. It will also reduce commuter times to and from Belfast. Of course, it will significantly improve road safety on that stretch of the road. As the Member is aware, the stretch of the road that will be affected by the investment of some £60 million over the next number of years ending in 2017-18 has unfortunately taken far too many lives down through the years. So, mercifully, that money will improve road safety standards there and, hopefully, ensure that events like that do not happen in the future.

The economic value of investing in infrastructure is clear. We have a great proposition in Northern Ireland with our skills and our highly educated people, and we have some of the best telecommunications infrastructure in the world, as I highlighted in my statement, but if you do not have the roads infrastructure to back that up and do not have other elements of infrastructure, those things do not attract people to come and invest in your economy. I am glad that there is some £250 million of investment in today's

statement, the vast bulk of which is going in a capital direction. It will greatly improve our infrastructure and will serve only to improve Northern Ireland as a place for investment and to grow companies and create jobs.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the announcement about the children's hospital, which is super news for families of the most vulnerable children and will be good for the wider North and, of course, for south Belfast.

The Minister mentioned the social investment fund in his statement. Can he confirm that any moneys from that will be allocated solely on objective need?

Mr Hamilton: This is the first formal opportunity I have had in the House to welcome the Member to his new position. This is as much an adaptation for me as it is for him; I have been well used to being interviewed by him down through the years, but I suppose it will be a different type of questioning that I will now receive from him. I thank him for his welcome for the children's hospital, which I am sure will meet with universal praise around this House and beyond.

The details of the social investment fund are not a matter for me; questions on it are better directed to colleagues in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I will not go into any issues about how or when the fund will be allocated. Some allocations have been made from the social investment fund. They include money for family support going to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the very good scheme for graduate teachers to try to lift standards in our primary and secondary schools. So, money is being spent and there is money still to be spent. I am confident that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is working through all the various projects, both capital and resource, that will benefit from that money. Any questions about the details of how that money will be spent are probably better directed to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Swann: I, too, thank the Minister for the A26 announcement.

Does he have any indication of any bids coming forward to provide new services in the new children's hospital that is to be built so that we do not just retain the provision that is there but provide a centre of excellence that can prevent our having to send some of our sick children across the water and that will allow us to use that facility to treat them?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The short answer is no. It is very early to determine exactly what services will go into the facility. Again, his question is probably better directed to the Health Minister now that he has the confidence that this money — some £160 million — has been allocated to the project. That gives him greater confidence, and it gives the Belfast Trust and the Royal Victoria Hospital greater confidence about what they can put on the site. From my visit to the site two weeks ago, I know that what is being done there is quite frankly miraculous, given the circumstances and the surroundings in which people are working.

What is great about this allocation today is that we will shift the hospital from where it currently is and integrate it much more into the rest of the acute hospital. So, some of the awful circumstances in which acutely ill children had to be moved by ambulance within the existing site will end, and children will be able to get a far better service. It will be

less traumatic for their parents and a better experience all round in what are very difficult circumstances.

With the money that the Minister of Health has been allocated to spend on this vital strategic project for the whole of Northern Ireland, I imagine that he will seek to ensure that the maximum number of services are delivered in a modern state-of-the-art facility.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his statement. A lot of very positive decisions have been taken, particularly on flood alleviation in east Belfast, given the rain that we had over the weekend.

To stick with health, will the Minister indicate how far the £14 million allocation for the Department of Health will go towards addressing waiting lists for elective procedures?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her welcome. Given the rain that is falling, one thing that I did not highlight was that money is allocated for the roof of this Building. I know that she is a member of the Assembly Commission, and I am sure that she is grateful that, as a result of that allocation, there will not be any flooding in the Chamber.

I think that the £14 million Health investment is a great welcome for the Health Minister. I have had direct discussions with him about the pressure that he, his Department and the trusts are under, and we all know from our constituency work that there is significant pressure across a range of specialisms. The £14 million that has been allocated in the monitoring round for this year will help to alleviate pressures on inpatient and outpatient procedures in a range of specialisms across the board such as ENT, orthopaedics, paediatrics and gynaecology. It obviously depends on the type of procedures that are brought forward, but the estimate is that around 10,000 to 12,000 additional procedures will be able to happen this year. That will obviously be great news for those who benefit from it, and, from our perspective, it will reduce waiting lists and ease some of that significant pressure that the Health budget continues to be under.

Mr Weir: I also warmly welcome the statement, but I will not incur your wrath by going any further than that. Is the Minister confident that all financial transactions capital funding in this year will be utilised?

Mr Hamilton: It is not like the Member not to try to incur somebody's wrath. This is obviously a Treasury innovation to try to increase the capital budget right across the United Kingdom in a way that does not score against national borrowing levels. It presents a challenge for me and my Executive colleagues because, by necessity, we have to partner with the private sector and investors outside the public sector to bring forward some schemes. We have had some early successes with the agrifood loan scheme, which this year will give £10 million to allow poultry processors and producers, in the first instance, to try to capitalise on the fact that supermarkets are trying to source more of their products from the United Kingdom. That money will help with that. Some money has been granted to DSD to try to stimulate different areas of the housing market.

12.45 pm

Some £21 million is left in financial transactions capital this year. The challenge that I continually put to my Executive colleagues is that they have to be more imaginative and

innovative about schemes that can be brought forward. They may have schemes on their list of desired capital projects that, although not quite forgotten about, have not had the concentration that some of the other schemes have had.

Conventional capital is going to be limited in future. Financial transactions capital will make up a greater percentage of capital. It is up to Ministers to be imaginative and creative about the sorts of projects that they bring forward and, where possible, partner with the private sector to ensure that we all benefit. Our society as a whole should benefit from getting on the ground much earlier capital projects that might otherwise not have come forward.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement and particularly welcome the announcement on the A26 scheme at Glarryford. However, will he acknowledge the despair of people along the A6, which has been a project much longer in the waiting for and carries the main road between the two major cities in this part of the world?

Mr Hamilton: I share the Member's support for the A6, perhaps for different reasons, as the Member represents the area. It is critical that the two major cities be better connected, by rail — there has been significant investment in rail down through the years — and by road. As the Member will appreciate, the A6 is a large road infrastructure project to take forward. It would certainly be too large to do so while the A5 project is somewhat in abeyance. The Executive are still committed to the A5 scheme, and my concern, in looking at allocations for 2014-15, is that if I were to make more of a commitment to the A6, it would contractually oblige us to move that project forward. If the A5 scheme also started to move forward, we would have two of the biggest road schemes in Northern Ireland's history moving forward simultaneously. Although we might be able to afford to do that out of our total capital budget, it would mean that there would be no investment in things such as the regional children's hospital or in some of the capital projects that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and other Ministers are bringing forward. Therefore, a judgement was made to allocate £1 million to allow some preparatory work that did not take us beyond being contractually obliged to the A6. That was the sensible and prudent thing to do at this stage. Should the A5 project not move forward for whatever reason, we will be in a better position to start taking forward the A6.

To give the Member some indication, the stretch of road between Castledawson and Randalstown would cost £130 million and take some five years from now to do. You would therefore be committing yourself for a long period and to spending a large amount of money.

However, those most directly affected by the A6 scheme should seek some comfort and solace from the fact that we are allocating small amounts of money to allow the project to at least move forward, rather than let it sit on a shelf and not have anything done. If the money becomes available for whatever reason and by whatever means, the project can, like the A26 scheme, which can be delivered in the time and is not as costly as that small section of the A6, be taken forward.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for his very comprehensive statement. In this monitoring round, additional money has been given to DCAL for the UK City of Culture. Has a business case been approved for that?

Mr Hamilton: Anybody to whom I have spoken and who has been a part of the first UK City of Culture in Londonderry considers it to be a success, in that it has generated more interest in the city and developed the infrastructure. We are seeing a lot of the investments that the Executive made in previous years pay off, and we can see that from the events that we are able to attract to the north-west, some for the first time. The Turner Prize is being launched this week, and it is the first time that it has ever been held outside London. That is a real success for the city. One of the lessons that we learnt from the Olympics, although this is not, by any means, on the same scale, is to ensure that the legacy from the investment that we put in is sustained. It is important that DCAL does that. I look forward to progress being made by DCAL in producing a business case to capture the critical aspects of the City of Culture legacy programme. Obviously, allocations have been made to that, but I await the business case, which will have to be revised to ensure that they can be spent appropriately.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the capital allocation to the children's hospital, and I hope that it provides a renewed focus on the children's heart services issue. I ask specifically about the £14 million allocation to the Health Department. All that money is for elective care. A number of bids were unsuccessful. The Department informed the Committee just last week that its priorities were: clinical negligence; Transforming Your Care; and, thirdly, elective care. Has the Finance Minister taken the Department's priorities on board?

Mr Hamilton: The initial position we come at Health from in monitoring rounds is that it should not be bidding or receiving anything in monitoring rounds. Funding for the Department of Justice (DOJ) is similarly ring-fenced. The Health Minister has considerable flexibility in his budget, which he enjoys as a result of the settlement for the 2011-15 Budget. However, the Executive accept and acknowledge that his budget is under constant and continued pressure.

The Executive are deeply concerned about elective care as there is almost endless pressure because of people who need inpatient and outpatient procedures. Some £10 million to £12 million of the money will allow those to happen. Obviously, it is not as much as the Minister bid for; he bid for £26 million. However, perhaps £14 million is more than he should have been permitted in monitoring rounds because of the agreement reached at Budget time. The Executive recognised that because there was such significant pressure for the Health Minister looming on the horizon, it was better to attempt to nip that in the bud now rather than him coming back in January, when things might be in a much worse position.

I accept that other bids with respect to Transforming Your Care were not met in this monitoring round, but a substantial amount of capital Transforming Your Care bids have been met in the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise. I am aware as well that there is a backlog of outstanding cases of clinical negligence that the Department is losing because a judge is bringing those forward. I have assured

the Health Minister that it is an area that we can examine again in January if those pressures have not been relieved elsewhere within his existing budget.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement by the Minister and the general thrust of trying to grow the private sector of the economy. There were about five references to the A5 in the statement. The Treasury allocated money that was project-specific and earmarked for that project. Is it still the commitment of the Executive to realise that project?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I think that he is somewhat confused: the money that comes as part of our Budget was not specifically earmarked for the A5 project. The Executive remain committed to what was agreed to be taken forward with the A5, which was a reduced but still fairly significant road project in size and distance.

As the Member knows, it is better for the Minister for Regional Development to take forward consultation on the outstanding environmental aspects of the project. The Minister has said that he does not believe that those will be resolved in time to spend the money for next year, so he has released around £150 million this year for the A5. I am glad to say that we are able to recycle and reuse that money for other significant strategic road projects elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

I am sure that the Member and people in the local community that he represents will be disappointed that the A5 project is not moving forward, but we are able to at least progress some other strategically significant road projects elsewhere in Northern Ireland as a result of the prudent and strategic financial capital management that we have undertaken as part of the exercise.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement. I thought that the economic overview was helpful. However, if he could improve on the 10-minute provision of the statement before the sitting so that we could do it justice, it would be much appreciated. My question is on capital at the macro level. There are many switches between resource and capital, and vice versa. We are halfway through the year, and I like the idea of that mid-term evaluation. However, there are some areas where capital is at risk. For example, we are talking about an overcommitment this year of some £8 million, and next year of some £50 million. Under financial transactions capital, £20.9 million is available this year, which I believe is at risk. Minister, is there some way in which we can rationalise the overall capital envelope somewhat? How sure are you that that £20.9 million will be saved this year?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The statement should have been in your pigeonhole around half an hour before the sitting. I did my best to slow down when reading it, so if you had it right at the start, it would have given you about an hour to digest it. We will attempt to do better in future.

As far as I am concerned, capital is critical to developing and growing our economy and assisting and aiding our recovery. We in this House have been attempting to make that clear to the Westminster Government since before the 2011-15 Budget came forward. That Budget initially cut our capital allocation by around 40%, and we sometimes forget how significant that cut was. Although the Government would not probably use these precise words, it is clear that they now regret the fact that they went too far too

fast in cutting our capital budget. That had a significantly detrimental impact on a sector that was already struggling, namely construction. We have tried to ameliorate that as best as we could over the past number of years through some current to capital switches and through accelerating some capital asset sales, which have generated some income that we can redeploy to capital projects. However, that in no way closed the gap from where spending was to where it started in this Budget period. I am glad that the Government have started to reverse their position and that they are now investing much more in capital. We are utilising that as best we can, and I hope that today's statement highlights that, with the likes of the children's hospital and the A26 moving forward.

There is no point having access to additional spending if you cannot spend it, and I must say that I have issues with how we procure and take forward significant capital projects. I want to concentrate on that as an area of work. We have already allocated about £29 million under FTC, and we have around £21 million left in FTC this year. As I said to Mr Weir, a growing aspect of our capital budget will be that different type of capital. I am confident that we can get that expenditure taken forward. I am continually putting pressure on other Departments to come forward with schemes that will absorb that money and I am asking officials to do likewise.

We have a large overcommitment for next year of around £50 million. Next year will be challenging, and we should not overcommit capital this year for next year. Next year, I do not think that you will see me come to the House with large amounts of capital allocations. Looking at previous experience, we can ensure that that overcommitment is well managed and that we spend every single penny at our disposal on capital because of the boost that it gives in the short to medium term to our construction sector and, in the longer term, the improvements that it means for infrastructure to assist, aid and develop our economic competitiveness.

Mr McCallister: I, like others, welcome the statement, particularly the announcement about the children's hospital. Let us hope that we have something to put in it. The Minister painted quite a rosy picture with his answers about the reduction in capital expenditure in this budgetary period. Is he basically engaged in a cleaning-up exercise and trying to help the Executive out of the mess of the A5?

Mr Hamilton: I will ignore the Member's fairly churlish remarks at the start. I am tempted not to get involved in some sort of domestic squabble between him and his former party.

If he believes that the handling of the A5 has been a mess — I tend to agree that aspects of it were not handled particularly well by the Minister for Regional Development — I suggest that the Member takes it up with his former colleague the Minister for Regional Development.

1.00 pm

The A5 is a strategically important project, which the Executive are committed to. For reasons about which questions are better directed to the Minister for Regional Development, that cannot go forward. The foolish thing to have done would have been to sit back and say that we cannot move forward so we will not do anything about it. The sensible thing to do is what I have done today, which

is to announce to the House that we are taking the money that cannot be spent on that — and, indeed, other capital money that cannot be spent, including some of the capital money that has come from Treasury, following on from some of the questions that Mr Cree asked — and investing that money wisely in other roads across Northern Ireland, such as the A26, which is a strategically important road as well and would improve journey times and road safety, and the A31, a much-needed bypass around Magherafelt.

As well as those important road projects, we can invest money in the children's hospital, which is in need of significant investment, as the Member will well know. Instead of being churlish, I would have thought that the Member might want to welcome good, sensible, sound investments to improve the infrastructure, which will deliver better services for the people in Northern Ireland and will assist us in our economic recovery.

Ms Brown: I also welcome the statement from the Finance Minister and very much welcome the positive announcement in relation to the new regional children's hospital. What is the timescale on that very significant project?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for the question. I know that she, as a member of the Health Committee, and others have been pushing for the commencement of that project for some time. Although there is only a small amount — some £15 million for the project this year — it is a big project. That allows it to get the green light and to start going ahead. It allows the Health Minister and the trust to plan for the development and to take it forward. The scheme is not due for completion until 2017-18, and its total cost will be some £161.1 million. I am sure that the Member will agree with me that that is money well spent on a service that will provide assistance when it is required for children and families from all across Northern Ireland.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers so far. I welcome his commitment to the A5 and the announcement of money for the City of Culture. I am sure that that will be the first tranche of many for the City of Culture legacy programme.

I want to ask the Minister a question in relation to the legal aid budget. As he will be well aware, the Legal Services Commission has never accurately predicted the budget for legal aid. Now that the Department is doing a focused piece of work on trying to make its predictions accurate, will your Department play any role in assisting it?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his welcome for the statement. I am well aware of the criticism of the legal aid process that the Member has highlighted. I recently attended the Law Society's annual dinner, and, had I been asleep, I probably could not have missed what was said fairly loudly and clearly. I support the Minister of Justice's attempts to reduce a very sizeable legal aid bill in Northern Ireland. He has done work that is worth praising to reduce the criminal legal aid bill, and I would be wrong if I did not encourage him to do likewise with civil legal aid, given the significant pressures that we are under in respect of resource expenditure.

There is no specified role for my Department in working with the Minister's Department to overcome those issues, but, as this Minister, and any Minister in the Executive,

will know, I have an open door in wanting to work with Departments. If they have issues and pressures — notwithstanding the fact that the Minister's Budget is ring-fenced and he has significant budget flexibility within his existing allocations to deal with problems such as the one that the Member raised — early engagement with my Department is more beneficial in the long term than sitting and thinking that the problem will go away or will not materialise.

Mr Ross: I also thank the Minister for his statement. In particular, I am drawn to the £3 million allocation for heritage-led development and the potential positive impact that could have on Carrickfergus Castle. What schemes does the Minister envisage the money being used for? Could the financial transactions capital funding that he referred to in answer to Mr Weir's question be used for that type of development?

Mr Hamilton: I have long believed — in fact, I mentioned it in my statement — that, earlier in the year or at the tail end of last year, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency produced a very valuable report which outlined its estimation that our built heritage and historic environment was worth around £250 million a year to our economy, but, significantly, that it had greater potential beyond that quarter of a billion pounds that it generated for our economy. It had the potential to increase that figure and to employ more people across Northern Ireland.

In bringing forward that motion in January or February, I was being mindful of the job that I was going to get at some time in the near future, and I was aware that I might be writing something of a blank cheque in respect of this policy area, but I am glad that I am able to support it with £1.1 million in this monitoring round and £3 million in the 2014-15 capital exercise. I have had discussions with the Environment Minister in respect of projects such as Carrickfergus Castle in the Member's constituency, which, we would all agree, is a fantastic facility, but it has potential to develop further.

There are commercial opportunities in a lot of the visitor attractions that we have across Northern Ireland, which have not been realised because that simply is not what the Department of the Environment traditionally does. So, to take up his point about financial transactions capital, I think that there are other areas of our built heritage and our historic environment where partnering with organisations outside the public sector such as the National Trust, have facilities that could be invested in to be developed, which have revenue-raising potential that can then be used to pay back the loan element of financial transactions capital. This is an area that I am very interested in and quite excited about the potential of, and I hope that the £4 million that has been allocated to the Department of the Environment in the next two years will allow us to test out and to see exactly what the potential is. If it works and money is available, we can invest more in the future.

Mr Dickson: Minister, thank you for your statement. The underfunding in the DSD budget is disturbing. Can you comment on how you perceive DSD's management of the Housing Executive?

Mr Hamilton: If the Social Development Minister were here, he would be fairly clear about what he thinks has, historically, been the management of Housing Executive resources. Although there is a reduced requirement in

the October monitoring round of £23 million for DSD, it is disappointing that what was initially targeted for — repairs and maintenance of existing Housing Executive stock — is not able to go forward. The result of that means that there are people who need those repairs and need that maintenance of their property who are simply not going to get that.

On the positive side, in terms of the good, sensible management of public funds, because that has been released, rather than simply sitting in the budget and maybe not coming back to us until January when it might be difficult to spend it, we can sensibly redistribute that — primarily, in this case, to roads maintenance — which will sustain and create other jobs in the construction sector, albeit not doing what was originally done.

I share the Member's disappointment, and I share the disappointment of the people who may have thought that they were getting work done. In terms of the management of funds, I would far rather that the Minister for Social Development was saying to me that he was not happy with the contracts or, in particular, the specification of certain aspects of those contracts, and releasing the money so that I can spend it and allocate it to others to spend, rather than it being wasted and being spent on overspecified contracts, and we would all come back in a number of years and ask why we spent so much more on that when we could have spent significantly less.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his good news statement this morning. Can he inform the House why we have not had more successful United Community bids?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question, not least because it allows me to pre-empt and clear up any confusion that there might be about the spending of the money. The Member will be aware that, in June, the Prime Minister and the First and deputy First Minister agreed what has been referred to as the economic pact, which included a provision to allow us to extend our RRI borrowing facility, which stands at £200 million a year, up by an additional £50 million this year and next year. That was specifically tailored for shared future, education and housing projects.

As a Department, we do not sit as the arbiter of those funds in any way. We simply receive the bids that come in from Departments, which then have to go to the Treasury for its assessment. The Treasury makes the ultimate decision on whether or not the bids qualify for the borrowing. It is not a matter of DFP saying that this, that or the other bid is not good enough; it is quite the opposite. We encourage Departments to come forward with more bids. We think that there is potential for more bids that will be successful with the Treasury. However, the ultimate arbiter on whether or not it goes ahead is not the Department of Finance and Personnel but Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the announcement about the Royal Victoria Hospital site. There is no money in this quarter for decay and dereliction scheme funding. Will that oversight be rectified in the January monitoring round? If the funding that you have allocated to the heritage-led development scheme proves your point that there is heritage-led development in Northern Ireland, is it your view that that should become part of mainstream funding on a rolling basis beyond your tenure? Will you confirm

whether the reduced requirement of the Housing Executive includes a reduced requirement for newbuild social housing funding? If so, does that concern you?

Mr Hamilton: The Member may have left ministerial office, but he has not lost his touch in stretching the tolerance of the Chair.

As the Member will know from having administered a departmental budget, there is only so much money to go around. In monitoring rounds, there is always a balance to be struck. Many of the bids that have not been met are good bids. The fact that they have not been met does not mean that they are bad bids. Some of them are new bids that have potential, and some are bids for existing or previous schemes that have been shown to work.

I support dereliction funding in principle. I have not been able to allocate additional money to it in this monitoring round. However, as far as I am concerned, it is not a policy that is completely finished. We will require the Member's colleague the Minister of the Environment to continue to come forward with bids for that. If it can be met, we are not averse to meeting it in the grand scheme of things. As I said, in allocating money at this stage of the financial year, we have to be very mindful about issues such as overcommitment. I appreciate that something such as a dereliction fund has the potential to get money spent very quickly. So, January may have better potential than October; I say that without making any commitment to do it.

As the Member will know, in the past, he and I had useful exchanges, in the House and outside, on heritage-led development. As I said in answer to Mr Ross, I am committed to it and think that it has huge potential. We have some underappreciated, undervalued and underused historical buildings across Northern Ireland. I hope that this money can start to develop the potential that I believe that the sector undoubtedly has.

It is as much a matter for the Minister of the Environment to come forward with bids to mainstream that budget for the years beyond 2014-15, in the 2015-16 Budget process that we are about to start and in future years. It has potential, and I am glad to be able to announce funding for it today. I hope that it is successful. Whether it is successful through conventional capital or financial transactions capital, as I outlined to Mr Ross, I think that it has huge potential.

Mr Beggs: I also welcome the announcement of a newbuild children's hospital for Northern Ireland. In health, under the addressing serious risks programme, only £5 million of £15 million has been allocated. Under Transforming Your Care key enabling projects, only £7.3 million of £26.5 million has been allocated. Why did the Minister decide to underfund those programmes significantly, in particular the TYC transformation programme, when the Department indicates that a failure to fund those will impact on future savings and lead to a change in expenditure patterns away from our hospitalised care, which will risk increasing waiting times at our A&E units and hospitals?

1.15 pm

Mr Hamilton: The Member has picked out a couple of things. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I had £500 million worth of capital bids for 2014-15, including quite a lot of cheeky bids from some Ministers who were chancing their

arm. They included his colleague at the Department for Regional Development who seemed to put every single bid —

Mr Beggs: Answer the question.

Mr Hamilton: The Member will have a bit of patience. He seemed to bid for every road project that he wanted to take forward, regardless of whether it was ready to move forward. I had to contend with £0.5 billion worth of capital bids for what, ultimately, turned out to be £170 million worth of capital expenditure at my disposal and that of the Executive.

As the Member will know, you cannot spend the £500 million if all you have is £175 million or £177 million, so, you have to make choices. That is what this place is all about. We have to make choices with the evidence that is before us and with the money that is before us. The Member is having a go at an allocation of £89.1 million, out of £177 million, to the Department of Health. That is a significant investment for the Health Department. It allows significant aspects of the Minister's Transforming Your Care programme to be taken forward. Is it everything that he wants? No, it is not. However, if you were to go round the Executive table and ask all the Ministers whether they got everything that they wanted, you would hear that they did not. That is the nature of the game that we have to play, Mr Beggs.

We have to make choices; we have to spend money where we think that it is best to do so. I think that spending £89.1 million, including significant TYC bids, is a good expenditure of the money that we have. It is particularly good that we are spending £15 million to give the green light to a new regional children's hospital for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): May I be associated with the words of congratulation in relation to the A26? It is not a case of the Minister winning the argument; it is a case of this Minister being responsible and delivering for the benefit of the people in north Antrim. I also acknowledge the additional money for DRD to move ahead with procurement for the Rathlin ferry and bus procurement for the provision of public transport.

As Chair of the Education Committee, I, first, thank the Minister for the money relating to Lisanelly and for the £2 million for the maintenance of the estate. However, will the Minister comment on the continued use of contingency funds by the Minister of Education, despite the fact that, in a letter to the Education Committee some days ago, his Department specifically said that that was not a good financial management practice?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his welcoming of the statement and particular aspects of it. With buses, ferries and roads, it is certainly a good day for north Antrim.

In respect of contingency funds, I know that we have corresponded, as a Department, with the Member in his capacity as Chair of the Committee. As a rule, I am not a fan of contingency funds, because Departments or, indeed, the centre can set aside money in a contingency fund, and, if the rainy day never appears, we have a mad, headlong rush at the end of the year to spend that money on sensible, prudent projects. I find that the later in the year that you get, the fewer projects there are that can

spend that sort of money. So, as a rule, contingency funds are not good practice.

The Member will be aware that there are strict rules about the reallocation of money within budgets. All Ministers have to declare amounts above the de minimis threshold of £1 million. The Executive usually allow reallocation; it is hard to think of a single example where they have not allowed for reallocation within Departments to happen. It is good, sensible management of the money that has been allocated by the Executive and the Assembly to flag that up, so that people can see where money has been moved to and where it has been moved from.

Mr Wells: I also welcome the announcement on the children's hospital; it is excellent news. I hope that, some day, the Minister will be able to stand up and announce the Ballynahinch bypass. Indeed, I think that we could do a deal that we will name it after him, if he releases the funds for it. In the statement, he has also indicated that £5 million has been allocated in the 2014-15 budget for local road schemes. Can he outline where those schemes are?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. With a deal like that, I am almost tempted to reallocate the reallocations. The Ballynahinch bypass would start in my constituency and end in the Member's constituency. It is something that I am very committed to. He brought an Adjournment debate on the issue to the House when he was a young whippersnapper, and I did likewise a few years ago. It is probably the only subject that has been the topic of two Adjournment debates in this House. Anybody who has to travel that road, whether they are going to Newcastle and the Mourne for leisure, pleasure and enjoyment or going home after work, knows that it is in much need of investment. However, no bid came forward from the Minister for Regional Development for that project as part of the 2014-15 exercise. However, I am glad that we have been able to support many road projects, including £5 million for what is detailed as local transport measures and network improvements.

The Minister for Regional Development and I had a discussion before the Executive meeting some weeks ago about some issues that were crystallising in his Department. This issue came up, and I pressed him on the sorts of projects that would come forward. The only one that he suggested is the A7 Saintfield to Crossgar project, which I am sure the Member will welcome. Again, the improvement to a small stretch of that road will benefit his constituents in South Down as well as constituents in Strangford. I look forward to the Minister for Regional Development bringing forward concrete plans for that road in the near future.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement. As Chair of the Committee for Regional Development, I welcome his announcements on the major road schemes. Why are we seeing so many reduced requirements for major roads schemes at present?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. As I said previously, I have issues with how we take forward major capital projects such as roads. There are some very good examples where we have not done well, not only on roads but on some other areas of capital expenditure. There are lessons to be learned from the way that other jurisdictions take forward major capital projects, and I

think that we can transplant those for the Northern Ireland context.

We are, obviously, well aware of the well-publicised delays to the A5 project, which I mentioned. That has freed up a significant amount of money, which I am happily able to reallocate to some other strategic road projects across Northern Ireland. I do not need to go much further on that, but as part of October monitoring there were reduced requirements for the A8 and the A2. The A8 reduced requirement is as a result of the cost and profile of spend on that project being reviewed. When compared with the original profile, less was needed this year and more was needed next year, so we have managed to balance that out as part of the announcements that I made today.

There was a reduced requirement of £11 million for the A2, which was the result of two factors: first, £8 million of that was as a result of the cost of the scheme coming in lower than expected, which is good news; secondly, the remaining £3 million was as a result of the reallocation of EU funding to that scheme. That has freed up money which, again, goes back to the centre for reallocation. Although on the face of it that probably looks bad because of the significant volume, in monetary terms, of reduced requirements for roads, I am sure that the Member and the rest of the House will agree that those reasons mean that the news is not as bad as it may be first appeared.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Like others, I welcome the allocation to the new children's hospital.

There was a bid of £17.6 million from the Department of Justice for the Northern Ireland prisons exit scheme. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Minister of Justice about the impact that there will be on Prison Service reform if that bid is not successful, or was it what the Minister would include as one of the cheeky bids?

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any discussions with the Minister of Justice, but he and I are keen to arrange a discussion very soon. Although his budget is ring-fenced and he has considerable flexibility within it to move money around to deal with pressures, I want him to proactively manage that budget before we look at some of the bids that are there. I accept that he is a man of his word and that there are pressures within his budget; therefore, I am content to have a discussion with him about those pressures. I will convey the message that I am conveying to you, which he is obviously hearing, but I will do that in private as well.

I think that the scheme that the Member referred to is a good scheme. I know the invest-to-save principles behind it, and it is so good that the Department of Finance and Personnel backed it in previous monitoring rounds. I think that some £20 million was given to it last year, which allowed the Minister to take forward his plans for the early exit of some prisoner officers and to replenish them with different and new staff. The bid is not a bad bid. If it was a bad bid, it would not have been acknowledged with allocations in previous years. I am pretty sure that the Minister of Justice will be back, if not in this year, in future years, to look for money for a scheme that has invest-to-save principles at its core.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Paul Girvan. We are into the last 10 minutes of questions to the Minister on his statement. With the cooperation of Members, I

am going to do my best to get as many Members in as possible.

Mr Girvan: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his very positive statement to the House. Is the allocation of £10 million from DRD to Belfast port to deal with a shortfall in receipts an indication that the Executive have given up on pursuing some value from the port?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. It is a good question. That obviously stands out in the tables that are attached to the statement as something that had to be allocated this year but that we obviously intended would not have been the case at the start of the Budget period.

I am disappointed that we have not been able to release value from the Harbour Commissioners. In principle, the port is a publicly owned asset. I have to say that it makes a valuable contribution not just to the Belfast economy but to the whole of Northern Ireland's economy, and I very much welcome some of the projects that are being brought forward, such as a terminal for cruise ships that are coming into Belfast. I also welcome the City Quays development, which will release more commercial office property for the foreign direct investment that we are trying to attract into Northern Ireland as a result of the likes of the investment conference and other work that Arlene Foster is doing. So, the commission does some good work. However, it has a significant amount of money in its reserves and the potential to release value back to our government so that we can spend that money on other capital projects that are equally of benefit to the Northern Ireland economy.

The issue has proven complex. The Minister for Regional Development would be in a better position than I to give you some of the detail, but taking it forward is fraught with legal and other difficulties. The fact that we have allocated money in this monitoring round is simply a recognition that we will not be able to crystallise that allocation from the Harbour Commissioners and make it happen this year. However, we have not given up on getting that value, which we believe we can get. We will continue to pursue that, and it is an issue that the Executive's Budget review group is taking forward.

Mr McQuillan: I also want to be associated with the opening remarks on what I would call phase 1 of the A26.

Will the Minister give the House an update on where we are with welfare reform? I see that some moneys have been returned to the centre from DSD under that heading.

Mr Hamilton: Again, the tables that are attached to the statement illustrate a noticeably reduced requirement from DSD for welfare reform. That results from the fact that because we have yet to legislate for welfare reform in Northern Ireland and have been unable to bring it forward, money that had been allocated to the Department for Social Development to do things such as IT training and skilling up staff so that they can implement the changes have not been able to happen.

I am glad that the Member raised that, because it gives me an opportunity to reiterate to the House the absolute, critical importance of ensuring that that legislation is passed as quickly as possible. My predecessor received a letter from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in late June or early July that told us that we were costing the Treasury

£5 million to £6 million a month because we had not moved forward with some of the elements of welfare reform. We were also told that that was going to grow to a position whereby, by the end of this year, we were going to cost £50 million to £60 million. According to the letter, that £50 million to £60 million will be taken out of our Budget if we have not legislated by January 2014. Worryingly, that bill is likely to rise to £200 million by 2017-18.

In the context of what I announced earlier about a switch from resource to capital and significant pressures on our resource budget in future years, £200 million taken out of our Budget to pay for something because we have not legislated for it is a price that we cannot afford. We need to move forward, and I know that the Minister for Social Development is unanimous with me on that. He is seeking approval to legislate on welfare reform so that those very punitive penalties that I am speaking about do not materialise and do not start to hit some of the very vulnerable people in Northern Ireland, whom some of those who oppose welfare reform think that they are helping.

1.30 pm

Mr Allister: I welcome the progress on the A26.

On the allocations in October monitoring and the 2014-15 capital budget, how does it just happen to be that the various Sinn Féin Departments have been most successful? In the allocations in the October monitoring round, they got 75% of what they asked for in capital bids. In the 2014-15 reallocations, they got 60% of what they asked for in capital bids, in contrast to other Departments. Is that part of the Minister's party's mending of fences with Sinn Féin, as we saw a few days ago with its love-in with the GAA? Is this part of the same process of the Minister rolling over for Sinn Féin?

Mr Hamilton: It would be easy to forget that at the very beginning — for about one second — the Member welcomed the allocation for the A26. However, it is very clear for the Member that every silver lining has a cloud. There is always bad news. This is a statement. This is a reallocation of over £250 million, which is going to projects in all Departments — right across the board. The money will be of great benefit in creating and sustaining jobs. It will improve our infrastructure so that we can have a competitive edge when we compete with other economies. It will assist us in our recovery. It will create opportunities for people right across Northern Ireland, and it will protect some of the most vulnerable in Northern Ireland.

That will be done through projects such as the A26 and the A31 Magherafelt bypass; through allocating £14 million to the DUP Health Minister's Department to provide elective care that is desperately needed by his constituents and by other people right across Northern Ireland; and through having a new regional children's hospital that goes to a DUP Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. There are projects that are greatly assisting our recovery, creating jobs and protecting the vulnerable in Northern Ireland. As to where allocations go, it is not a matter of sitting down and carving up allocations for this Department and that Department. As the Member knows well, some Departments spend more on capital than others, and some of the bids that have come forward are more critical in their timeliness than others.

If the Member wants to take the money that we have and allocate it on the basis of some sort of sectarian headcount, that kind of suits his approach, but it does not suit my approach. I want to send money from this Department when it is given up by others to where it is most needed. If that is for the A26 in his constituency or the new regional children's hospital in west Belfast, I will do that.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Allister: You did not answer my question.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions on the statement.

Prison Reform: Owers Report

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on prison reform. This Thursday marks the second anniversary of the publication of the report by the prison review team, which was led by Dame Anne Owers. I will update Members on the progress that has been made since publication and outline the work that is taking place to make a positive impact on prisoners to reduce their risk of reoffending.

The report calls for end-to-end transformational change across the prison system in Northern Ireland. Its 40 recommendations were challenging, but I believed then, and I believe now, that it set the road map to deliver an effective, efficient and sustainable service. I said at the time of publication that implementing the recommendations would be a long-term process and that we would have to put in place solid foundations if reform was to be embedded throughout our prisons. The service established a reform programme to put in place the foundations for delivery and to drive the necessary changes.

The reform programme is at the halfway point. Good progress is being made. To date, nine recommendations have been approved as being complete by the prison review oversight group, which I chair. The group provides oversight and scrutiny of the programme and includes a robust and challenging independent element. I anticipate that a further nine recommendations will be brought forward to the group for sign off at its next meeting in December. If those are signed off, almost half of the recommendations will have been implemented. That demonstrates steady progress.

From the outset, I have said that implementing the reforms will be a process and not an event. That remains the case. As with any major reform programme, the pace of change can feel frustrating at times. The next year is a critical period, when many of the recommendations from the Owers report will become reality. A clear plan for delivery is in place. However, some of the major projects that are part of the plan will not be realised until nearer April 2015. This is normal in a complex reform programme: they take time to get right. It is not just about ticking off each recommendation. That is why, in June, I announced a number of initiatives that would make a real difference to the way in which prisons operate and how we support people through custody and back into the community. Today, I can announce that the two reviews that I commissioned into the prisoner incentive scheme and the categorisation of women and young people have been completed. The next stage is to ensure that they are put into practice. Discussions are ongoing with governors on how that will be achieved.

Last month, I published an employability strategy. I can inform Members that, as part of that strategy, a new passport to employment has been developed and will be piloted in Maghaberry soon. Prison Service staff will also work with NIACRO to link that work into the job track initiative.

In June, I highlighted the issue of addiction in prisons and announced that a new dual approach would be implemented to tackle the issue. The first part of that was the initiation of intelligence-led searching to replace the

standard routine search policy. That is now in place. There is also a Prison Service/PSNI initiative at Maghaberry where they have joined forces to reduce the supply and demand of drugs in the prison. I also wanted to see support put in place for those with addiction issues. Prison staff are being selected to work on the new cutting-edge addiction programme, which will be piloted in Maghaberry in the new year. That will be a complete programme regime, which will support prisoners to break the cycle of addiction. It is the first of its type in the British Isles and demonstrates the innovative approach that prison staff are willing to take to deliver change.

Since my announcement in June, a new directory of services has also been developed that will provide prisoners with details of the support services available. It will be launched later in 2013 following consultation with prisoners and key partners. One key area in delivering for prisoners will be the outsourcing of learning and skills, which, it is anticipated, will happen around this time next year. That will increase overall levels of prisoner participation in employment and education across the three prisons. However, I am not content to wait until 2014 for progress in that area. Therefore, I can inform Members that work to award an interim contract for learning and skills is being finalised. I expect letters of award to be issued next week. Awarding the interim contract will not only deliver an enhanced service in the next year, but it will allow the service to move to the next stage to establish the Hydebank college. That will be achieved through a college task force that will be responsible for designing, developing and delivering the college ethos and results. I can also announce that the concept college prospectus will be launched at the end of November.

Another area that will interest Members is the latest position on the prison estate, particularly future plans for women in custody. Our focus is a prison estate that is fit for purpose, which provides safe, secure and decent accommodation for all prisoner categories and addresses the specific needs of young offenders and women prisoners. Work to further define the future direction of travel for Maghaberry is ongoing and the future of Magilligan prison has been set. As I have outlined, the Hydebank college will deliver positive interventions for young people in custody.

Today, I want to focus on the needs of females. I wish to put on record that I remain committed to having a separate prison for women. However, that will not happen in the near future. To address that, a four-stage approach will take place, which will deliver positive change for female prisoners. The first stage is the development of Ash House, which will deliver an enriched regime, freer movement and greater access to services. The second will be to couple that with the development of our "prisons inspire" concept in Alderwood House. The third phase will see residential units also being developed. All of that will be subject to the normal planning processes. The final stage will be the development of a new women's prison, and I anticipate high-level plans for that by the end of the year.

Another key part of the reform will be how offender management policies are embedded across the service, and we have spoken at length about the need for an integrated approach to that. Unlike other jurisdictions, prisons in Northern Ireland already have in place a policy

to ensure that every offender has a sentence plan. That is being achieved through the reforms and through our offender management hubs, which bring together staff from the Prison Service and the Probation Board to ensure an integrated approach in that area. That is by no means the limit to our ambition because we want to create an effective end-to-end resettlement process.

I could not update the House on prison reform without acknowledging the major changes that have taken place in the workforce over the past 18 months. Many experienced officers and managers have left under the voluntary early retirement scheme, and we have seen the recruitment of hundreds of new officers. Many staff have also converted from support grades to become custody officers. That has been challenging for all concerned, but I believe that we now have in place the right balance between new and experienced staff, which will serve our prisons and the wider community well into the future.

One of the areas that has attracted attention from Members is the new operating model for prisons that was introduced last October. The reason for that was to ensure we had the right people in the right place at the right time, doing the right things. The operating model encompasses four key elements: the staff deployment agreement; the staffing structure; the staffing profile; and the shift patterns. In combination, that will deliver a sustainable model for our prisons that is efficient and effective. The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) profiling team has reviewed the implementation of the operating model at each prison establishment over the past six months. NIPS will continue to develop, modify and enhance the shift patterns as part of business as usual.

It is also important that operational staff have the skills to deliver a Prison Service that will create positive interventions that address offending behaviour. That means making sure that all grades have access to the right training, which gives everyone the opportunity to build a career in the service. To deliver that, a series of training programmes have been developed for all staff, from main grade officers to senior officers, right through to management grades. That will include a year-long series of masterclasses that will address many issues from financial planning to incident management. Last month, it was announced that the University of Ulster has been awarded the contract to accredit the certificate of competence for our new officers. That was good news for officers because it will give them the opportunity to demonstrate the new skills they have developed through their training and in the workplace.

I can also inform the House that promotion boards are being held for functional head grades, and there will be promotion opportunities to the senior officer grade by the end of this year. Alongside that, former principal officers have become unit managers, and work to finalise the role of offender supervisors is almost complete. Those are very positive developments for staff and they demonstrate the service's commitment to give everyone the skills they need to do their job.

Reforming the prison system in Northern Ireland is the biggest change programme in the public sector since the formation of the PSNI in 2001. It is a huge project. The recommendations from the Owers report were not straightforward. As I said, the vision of the report was to deliver end-to-end transformational change. That means

changing the structures, ethos and culture of the people who work for prisons and how they work with those who are in custody, all of which has to be delivered within today's financial restrictions. The Prison Service is an organisation in transition, and many people are working to make the changes a reality. I am greatly encouraged by the work that is being done and the progress that has been made.

As I have set out, the reforms are delivering for women in custody, with a four-stage plan to provide a bespoke infrastructure and regime for female prisoners. They are delivering for young people in custody, with the establishment of Hydebank college. They are delivering for all prisoners, with the new interim learning and skills contract now in place and outsourcing to be completed next year, and with the goal of sentence planning for every prisoner. The reforms are also delivering for our staff, with development plans for every grade to build their skills and career in the service.

Reform of our prisons will ultimately be about making the community safer. That will be achieved by creating positive interventions to address offending behaviour, which will reduce the risk of reoffending. That is what I want the reformed Prison Service to deliver, and I am confident that that is what the reformed Prison Service will deliver.

1.45 pm

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice):

The Minister will know that we discussed some of those issues, and it was highlighted that relationships are key. I impress upon him again to make sure that relationships between management and staff are working properly, as current indications are that they are not. The statement refers to the voluntary exit scheme. Can the Minister give an absolute guarantee that the 27 officers who remain on the letter 3 option but have been accepted into the scheme will be allowed to leave the service? It would be grossly unfair, having allowed up to 500 officers to leave, if that small element of 27 officers was kept in the service despite them having signed up to the scheme. Can he give the commitment that he will find the money in his Department or through a bid so that those 27 officers will ultimately be allowed to leave the service?

Mr Ford: I thank the Chair for his comments. I am committed to ensuring that we get the best possible relationships between staff and management in the Prison Service, allowing for all the difficulties that arise from such a programme of reform. Unfortunately, I cannot, at this stage, give him the guarantee that he asks for: that all those who have applied under the voluntary early retirement scheme will be able to leave. I am sure that he heard the question that was asked of the Minister of Finance a few minutes ago. He indicated his keenness to see the scheme proceed and acknowledged that there was assistance from DFP last year in funding towards that. I hope that it will be possible to obtain funding in this year, but the Chair of the Committee is well aware of some of the pressures that we face on issues such as legal aid costs that are creating significant difficulties this year. I trust that we will be able to see towards the end of the year that there is some way of allowing that final batch of officers and, indeed, some governors to get their leaving date, but, at this stage, I regret that I cannot give the guarantee that he seeks.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answer to the previous question. The Minister will be well aware that the Owers report presents an opportunity and, indeed, a challenge. I look forward to the oversight group coming to the Committee to tease out some issues further. This is the halfway mark, and the Minister said that it is not an exercise to tick off the recommendations. Is he satisfied, at the halfway point, that he is well on target to reach the final outcome and have all the recommendations in place on time?

Mr Ford: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for his question. He correctly identifies that we are talking about an extremely challenging process, and, at more or less the halfway point, we are close, as I said in the statement, to having 18 of the 40 recommendations signed off. That signing-off is not a simple case of box-ticking. Reports come to the oversight team and it agrees them, and they are then passed to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) for validation. As he would expect from the independent members of the oversight group, they have robust discussions with me and with officials from the Prison Service to see that that is done. We are seeing significant progress, but we cannot expect that some of the more complex issues will be resolved until near the end of the process in spring 2015. However, with the team that is in place and with the good work being done in the three prisons, but particularly by the leadership team at headquarters, we are seeing significant progress at this time, and I believe that all the reforms will be in place by the expected closing time in spring 2015.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement. In a sense, the statement was pre-empted, to some extent, by the debate last week on prison reform. The Minister has acknowledged in the statement that the pace of reform can be quite frustrating, and I agree with him on that. Where is the logjam that is preventing the prison reform being fully implemented? Is that logjam, as Mr Givan identified earlier, the relationship between staff and management?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for the question. I hope that the statement was not entirely pre-empted by last week's debate, which was a debate on a negative report on a situation that existed in Hydebank Wood in the early part of this year.

I hope that this statement shows the significant progress that has been made, but I take the point. Shortly, we will have some questions during Question Time which will probably cover much the same ground.

The issue with the pace of reform is the complexity of the overall process, which made it quite difficult to get matters under way. There were significant issues around staffing and the time it took to get the senior team in place. The team that Sue McAllister now leads will be capable of leading through all of these reforms, as well as the changes that are being made in staffing in the three individual units.

Whether there is a logjam in relationships, I am not sure. We saw a withdrawal of goodwill by the Prison Officers' Association (POA) earlier this year on working overtime, which has ended. However, maintaining good working relationships with a workforce that is going through such significant transformation is always a major challenge. It

is not easy, as we know, in any part of the public sector to ensure that staff are always brought along with that level of change. However, we have at least seen, through the recent ending of the withdrawal of goodwill, that there is an option for moving forward in a more constructive way.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the update. In his statement, he said:

"There is also a Prison Service/PSNI initiative at Maghaberry where they have joined forces to reduce the supply and demand of drugs in the prison."

Can the Minister give us any more detail on that project at the moment, or at a later stage if required, and on how progress on that project will be both measured and monitored?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Elliott for highlighting what is quite a significant issue. Tackling drugs is actually a two-pronged issue. The first part is the point that he highlights, namely the work being done, which involves the PSNI in a joint initiative at Maghaberry, to detect and deter the smuggling of drugs. I need to be cautious when talking about matters that are sub judice, but it was interesting to note that there were three arrests related to an attempt to smuggle drugs into Maghaberry just before we publicly announced that the initiative had started. That is one part.

The other part is around education and ensuring that we see that prisoners are aware of the dangers of illegal drugs and, indeed, the dangers associated with inappropriate prescribed drug use. So there are issues there.

It is absolutely clear that we need to fight the issue of drugs in prisons at a number of different levels. The partnership with healthcare on prevention is extremely valuable, as is the partnership with the PSNI on detection. Certainly, it appears that, at this early stage, moving away from routine regular searching to intelligence-led searching is having significant benefits.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your statement. As you said, this is ongoing work and work in progress. One area that has concerned us is improvement for women prisoners. Can the Minister tell us more about the four stages that he intends to take to improve the delivery of services and, ultimately, improve outcomes for women prisoners?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Dickson for the question, which highlights an area that has been a significant concern for some time. The first of the four stages, to give a little bit more detail on what I was able to say in the statement, is to seek to improve the physical situation within Ash House in Hydebank Wood, acknowledging that it is likely to remain the residential unit for some time. So work is going ahead to create slightly different physical space, which will enable the development of vocational work on things like hairdressing and kitchen and laundry work alongside access to IT, and improve the facilities that are offered in that building.

The second stage is to use Alderwood House, which is currently used by the Probation Service and is on the Hydebank Wood site but is outside the wall, to create something of a step-down and working out facility. In the first part of that, simply providing some educational classes will be a possible use that will enable people to move into a different atmosphere. We will then work

towards the work that is being done by the Inspire project in the city centre on working with women offenders.

We then hope that we will see some step-down residential units being developed alongside Alderwood House as the third phase for those women who require a degree of supervision but not significant custody as they move towards the end of their sentences and further on out.

Finally, there is the major challenge of getting the right size of full women's prison off the Hydebank Wood site, or at least outside the young offenders centre's wall, to ensure a proper facility for women prisoners in Northern Ireland, which has been denied them for many years.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he mentioned training programmes. My colleague the Chair of the Committee mentioned the key issue of relationships, and you will be aware that the Prison Officers' Association representative said that there is a recruitment difficulty in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Given that there was a leadership and management void at Hydebank Wood for over a year, when there was no governor or deputy governor and the new governor was English, as were three of the senior management team who were in front of the Committee last week, is there an issue about Ulster people being recruited at senior management level in the Northern Ireland Prison Service?

Mr Ford: I get slightly surprised at the number of complaints from the unionist side of the Assembly about the employment of British citizens who happen to live on the other side of the water. We have an open competition employment process, and we seek to employ the best person for the job. Whether the best person for the job happens to speak with an accent that suggests that they come from one side of the water or the other is not a relevant consideration. The consideration is whether they are the best person with the experience for the job.

Although I acknowledge that Mr Humphrey talked specifically about senior Prison Service officers, the reality is that a very small proportion of Prison Service staff come from outside Northern Ireland. If we have a process in which some people move one way across the Irish Sea and others move the other way at different times, that is a benefit that enriches the services on both sides of the water and not something we should complain about.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire inniu. I welcome the Minister's statement. Will he elaborate on the "high level plans" for the women's prison? Will that bring forward the date for the provision of that facility? In the interim, will the improved services for women include making it freely available to women to avail themselves of day release to partake in work?

Mr Ford: I thank Ms McCorley for the question, although I am afraid that I cannot elaborate any further on the long-term replacement for Ash House. I hope to say more about that, probably early in the new year to the House, and I certainly give a commitment to inform the Committee, if not the full House, at the earliest stage possible.

The important issue in how we seek to make the changes is to ensure that women get the opportunity to avail themselves of a variety of opportunities, depending on individual risk assessment. We know that many of the

women in Ash House are perfectly capable of leaving the wall of Hydebank Wood to engage in some form of training or day activity. That has been happening for some time, and some women have gone to the Inspire project in the city. The issue is whether we can develop schemes in Alderwood House that allow greater numbers to benefit from doing that. We should be doing that, based on individual risk assessment, to prepare women for release from custody. We will see more of that in the coming weeks.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. Questions on the statement will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to be called will be Mr Sydney Anderson.

The business stood suspended.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Child Exploitation

1. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Justice what input the Department of Justice will have into the terms of reference for the investigation into child exploitation. (AQT 241/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I thank Mr Milne for the question, although I had better not say too much. It might annoy one of his colleagues if I go too far into the territory which is question 1 on the main list. The answer is that no specific actions were required of the Department of Justice (DOJ) in the Barnardo's report of 2011, but since then we have been working in partnership with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Safeguarding Board to look at various roles in the protection of children. I have had meetings with the Minister of Health and others to look at how that occurs. As Members know, an expert-led inquiry is being set up to consider the way forward.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. Can he tell us exactly what those discussions with the Minister of Health consist of? Does he not agree —

Mr Deputy Speaker: One question, please.

Mr Milne: At the heart of all this is an issue of justice, and, therefore, in my opinion, it is very necessary for the Justice Department to be heavily involved in it.

Mr Ford: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, I really am at a loss. My understanding is that questions at this stage are not supposed to pre-empt those that are on the list. Any further answer would merely pre-empt an answer to a prepared question, which is not particularly topical.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister that it is entirely up to him whether he answers.

Mr Ford: I will happily answer in 15 minutes' time.

Prison Reform

2. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice to comment on his ongoing relationship with the Prison Officers' Association. (AQT 242/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not had direct contact with the Prison Officers' Association (POA) in recent weeks. I have certainly had engagement with it over different aspects of the reform programme. Senior officers of the Prison Service continue in those discussions, and I am keen to see that we manage the reform process in conjunction with all our staff, whether they are members of the POA, the Prison Governors' Association (PGA), the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) or none of them.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his

answer. Can he give an assurance to the House that his change and reform agenda will not be deflected, despite difficulties or resistance from within the institutions?

Mr Ford: I can certainly give Mr McLaughlin that assurance. As I said in answer to questions a few minutes ago, we saw a short-term withdrawal of goodwill by the POA recently, which ended in the last few weeks. I hope that that is a sign that good progress will continue to be made. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that the reform programme is driven through against all the operational difficulties. I am not just saying that that applies to staff; the practical realities of the end-to-end reform are quite a challenge.

Prison Officers: Pay Review

3. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department will support the Prison Officers' Association when it makes its presentation to the pay review body. (AQT 243/11-15)

Mr Ford: My understanding of that is quite simple. The pay review body will seek the evidence that it wishes. It has had a detailed evidence presentation from my Department, and it will clearly have to engage with staff, including the POA, as it reviews the work that it has to do in looking at the matter which I referred to it.

Mr Clarke: I use the Minister's words with respect to the evidence. Given that there is clear evidence of a threat to all prison officers, will the Minister support the payment of an environmental allowance to all officers who are currently working for the Prison Service?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr Clarke's point. For many existing staff, the previous environmental allowance was consolidated into normal pay scales. The issue that is of particular concern is that new members of staff may feel that they are being paid less proportionately, by comparison with their colleagues who have received that consolidated award, and in comparison with what happens in England, Wales and Scotland. It is not appropriate to make a direct comparison, as is frequently done — though not by Mr Clarke today — with the issue as it applies to police officers. Police officers across the UK are paid on the same scale, and there is an additional allowance in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, we have completely different pay scales. The issue is in ensuring that they bear an appropriate relationship to the pay scales for England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Alex Maskey is not in his place for his question.

PSNI: Recruitment

5. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that the recent opening up of recruitment to the PSNI is to be welcomed and that it allows for a further transformation and civilianisation of the Police Service, which, as the Minister will know, is not yet fully representative of the society that we live in. (AQT 245/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the Member will know from his role on the Policing Board, there are issues around the numbers and the budget. I welcome the fact that the Police Service is now in the position to start a new recruitment campaign for the first time in some years. The important issue for

that recruitment campaign, given that the specific artificial 50:50 targets are removed, is to get the best possible affirmative action programme, which is being carried through by the Police Service, to ensure that it gets the widest possible range of applicants and continue the work that it has been doing in recent years to ensure that it becomes a representative service.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Minister for the answer so far. His Department is responsible for the business case for recruitment. Does the Minister agree that it is lamentable that Criminal Justice Inspection described what we have as large-scale reverse civilianisation, not as Patten saw the PSNI, in which civilian posts are being populated by retired police? Does he agree that the recruitment campaign provides an excellent opportunity to put that right, bearing in mind that the recruitment is not just the 100 that we are talking about now but that it could go to perhaps up to 400?

Mr Ford: The difficult issue of exactly which functions are best carried out by warranted officers and which by civilians and what the background of those civilians may be is not one for my direct involvement. I need to be very careful to leave the Policing Board with its responsibilities in such matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the House discourages reading questions.

Flag Protests

6. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the continued flag protests in Belfast, particularly around the city centre, whether he agrees that it would be in the interests of all concerned if such protests were suspended during the Haass process. (AQT 246/11-15)

Mr Ford: I appreciate the question, but I am not quite sure how far I have a ministerial responsibility for it. As for the responsibility to ensure a more normal society, better opportunities for business, especially in Belfast city centre, and the chance to benefit from the five-party talks that Dr Haass is leading, I certainly believe that it would be beneficial for any protests, whether they are around Donegall Square or Twaddell Avenue, to be suspended immediately to allow this society to move on and to find a different way of dealing with the community problems with the past.

Dr McDonnell: I very much thank the Minister, particularly if it is slightly off-centre of his responsibility. Nevertheless, we see him as having a major role in that regard. Does he agree that such protests are a big threat, as they were last year, to trade in Belfast city centre in the run-up to Christmas? All of us have a collective responsibility to do all we can to reduce that threat to retail trade.

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Dr McDonnell on that point. I had a recent meeting with business representatives from the city centre. It is absolutely clear that there has been a major difficulty with business in Belfast city centre in recent months, way beyond the effects of the economic recession generally as it applies to other parts of Northern Ireland.

If there are further problems in the run-up to Christmas this year, it will be devastating for many businesses in Belfast city centre, and particularly for many services. It is possible that somebody may go back to a shop the

next week if they are deterred from going to it one week, but they do not go back to the restaurant or pub the next week. It is clear that that has been very damaging. That is why we collectively have a responsibility to urge people to call off such protests and to ensure that we conduct our processes in this place or through the Haass talks.

Ministry of Defence Files

7. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Justice to comment on the recent public disclosure that the British Ministry of Defence is unlawfully holding more than 66,000 files in a privately owned warehouse in Swadlincote, South Derbyshire, many of which came from the British Army headquarters in the North of Ireland that was closed four years ago. (AQT 247/11-15)

Mr Ford: I think, Deputy Speaker, that what is being done by a UK Department in England is far beyond the responsibility of the DOJ in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has the right to ask a supplementary question.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister agree that the fact that this was never disclosed to the PSNI's Historical Enquiries Team and was never discovered by that team is cause for further concern about the lack of rigour and effectiveness of the HET in reviewing British Army killings? Will he agree to write to the British Ministry of Defence to ensure that those files are secured and not destroyed?

Mr Ford: The key issue with that concerns the operational work done by the Historical Enquiries Team. I am not sighted on whether there were specific requests for information that were not forthcoming or on what the relationship may be between the HET or the PSNI and the Ministry of Defence. Therefore, I am not sure that I am in any position to give a specific comment there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Michael McGimpsey is not in his place.

PSNI: Recruitment

9. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Justice whether he is content with the procedures being put in place for the recruitment of new PSNI officers. (AQT 249/11-15)

Mr Ford: Again, although I can appreciate that Mr Byrne wishes to ask the question, that is a matter for the PSNI and the Policing Board, not the Department of Justice. I have no reason to believe that the procedures are not proper.

Mr Byrne: I appreciate that the Minister has a limited role and function in this regard, but, given that he is the Minister of Justice, is it appropriate that he could be blindsided if there were any misdemeanours in relation to the recruitment process?

Mr Ford: Again, the key role there rests with the Policing Board, not with the Department of Justice. If there are specific concerns that Mr Byrne or any other Member wishes to raise, I will happily have them raised, but I need to be careful that I do not interfere in the responsibilities of other Members who are on the board.

PSNI: Investigations

10. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that it is absolutely necessary that the PSNI, in cases of child abuse, carry out extensive interviews until they believe that they have got to the full truth, regardless of the position that anyone might hold in society. (AQT 250/11-15)

Mr Ford: Yes, I believe that the police have a duty to carry out their investigations as thoroughly as they need to in accordance with the legal advice that they are given on particular cases.

Mr Newton: Will the Minister agree that there is significant concern around the case that involved the leader of Sinn Féin and a perception in the wider community that the interviews may not have been as rigorous as one might have expected?

Mr Ford: I am not sure that I am a barometer for what the perceptions in wider society may be. That appears to be Mr Newton's request. All that I know is that I have no reason to believe that the police and the PPS did not carry out their duties properly in the case to which Mr Newton refers, as, I understand, they do as a general rule in other cases.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes topical questions to the Minister of Justice. We will now move on to the questions for oral answer.

Children in Care

1. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has held any meetings in conjunction with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the recent revelations about children in care. (AQO 4823/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 10 September, Edwin Poots and I jointly chaired a summit on child sexual exploitation at which key agencies were represented. That summit identified that much is already being done in and across Departments and the statutory and voluntary agencies to tackle issues of sexual violence and abuse, including human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Following the summit, Mr Poots and I attended a special joint meeting with the Health and Justice Committees on 16 September.

Following further engagement between us, on 25 September, it was announced that we had agreed to establish an expert-led independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation. The inquiry will be supported jointly by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland and will seek to assist in developing an effective regional response to sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. Terms of reference will be agreed following the appointment of the independent chair. I have also engaged with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the review that the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland is to carry out.

2.15 pm

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is important for his Department to have an input to the terms of reference?

Mr Ford: I agree that it is important that we should have an input into the terms of reference, and that is taking place. What we need to do first is establish the independent chair and then work with the chair on detailing the terms of reference in conjunction with the two Departments.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. Can he tell the House what, with regard to children in care, is the definition for recording purposes of "missing"?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I cannot answer that question. It might have to be referred to my ministerial colleague Mr Poots.

Mr Givan: Will the Minister give a clear public statement that, in respect of children who are abused, whether in care or in institutions — indeed, regardless of where the abuse is taking place — anybody who knows about it must report it to the police immediately and there should never be any withholding of information of the type of abuse that we have witnessed?

Mr Ford: I am happy to endorse the point that Mr Givan makes. I will widen it: anybody with any knowledge of any criminal activity has a duty to inform the police and to ensure that they assist in any way that they can in bringing the perpetrators to justice. That is nowhere more obvious than in some of the dreadful crimes that affect the welfare of children or, indeed, vulnerable adults.

Mr Beggs: Young people in care experience a higher level of grooming, but the problem also exists among vulnerable young people in our community. Will the Minister advise us whether the Minister of Education has engaged with him and the Minister of Health to ensure that the resilience of all our young people is reassessed so that those who would try to exploit them will be prevented from accessing and abusing them?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Beggs's point about the importance of ensuring that all young people are protected, not just those in the care system. The key issue there relates to the work being done by the Safeguarding Board, which, of course, comes under DHSSPS. I have not had direct engagement with the Minister of Education on the issue. At this stage, the engagement has been led by DOJ and DHSSPS.

National Crime Agency

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the process required to introduce the National Crime Agency legislative framework. (AQO 4824/11-15)

Mr Ford: To extend the remit of the National Crime Agency (NCA) into the devolved arena and to build in appropriate, local safeguards about its operation here, the Assembly's consent is required before secondary legislation can be made at Westminster. In practical terms, that would require me to consult the Justice Committee on a statutory operating model for the NCA and to secure the agreement of the Executive. The Crime and Courts Act 2013 provides the Home Secretary with order-making powers so that the NCA provisions can be fully extended to Northern Ireland, with the appropriate consent arrangements with the Assembly.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm to us today that he will not permit so many concessions in the NCA legislative framework that it would

have such diminished significance in Northern Ireland that it would not be of great importance to national security?

Mr Ford: I appreciate the point that Mr Elliott seeks to make; indeed, he has made it in the Chamber before now. I am concerned to see that we get the NCA operating in a way that enables its full powers to be used against criminality and organised crime from a variety of sources in Northern Ireland, subject to the appropriate safeguards of the operating model here. I believe that we have made significant progress around that, and that has not involved diluting the powers of the NCA but has involved working around the accountability mechanisms. It is absolutely clear that we do not yet have the political agreement to enable us to make that progress, but I have not lost sight of being able to make that progress. My officials and I continue to engage with those in the House who at this stage are unable to agree the proposals as they stand. I certainly do not see any prospect of the kind of diminution that is spoken of by Mr Elliott.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has been clear in spelling out the problems that are arising at the moment because we do not have the framework. Can he be equally clear about what the people of Northern Ireland are missing with the NCA not operating here and about the potential impact that it will have on the people of Northern Ireland if we do not have the full implementation of the National Crime Agency here?

Mr Ford: Mr Campbell makes a good point, but he is almost asking me to define a negative. If we do not have full operational powers, the NCA will not be able to deliver the same assistance to the PSNI in the fight against organised crime as, until 7 October, we had from the Serious Organised Crime Agency. It will hamper a variety of crimes, including issues such as child exploitation and human trafficking, drug smuggling and fuel laundering. It will not necessarily mean that those activities cannot be carried out against such criminals, but it will mean that the PSNI has to devote resources that would otherwise be available from the NCA.

I suspect that there is a danger of a confusion of role, if members of various agencies are not sure exactly what the role of the NCA is in our current difficulties, and there will be a specific issue about being able only to use reserved powers for civil recovery. The NCA will not be able to use its powers of civil recovery in the devolved field. So, armed robbers and fuel launderers may well find that their assets cannot be seized as they currently stand. There will also be a problem that any claim made by the NCA for civil recovery for an issue here can be made only in the Northern Ireland High Court and cannot be replicated in London and Edinburgh under current restrictions. So, there are a number of restrictions, and, at this stage, we have the PSNI working to fill the gap as best it can and the engagement by my Department with other Members to see if we can get the arrangements fixed.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Does the Minister agree that there is now an opportunity for him, as Minister of Justice, to introduce legislation that would tackle serious crime and make it very effective but, importantly, make it accountable?

Mr Ford: I am not sure what legislation I could bring through in any meaningful timescale that would enable us

to fix the current gap. Even if we were to seek to introduce a new Bill in this place and even if there were complete political agreement, there would be a significant gap to allow the consultation, the drafting and the processes of the House to be gone through, and I do not believe that we can wait for those processes to be gone through.

I believe that we have now got to the situation where the accountability mechanisms are in place to allow the NCA to operate in Northern Ireland subject to our normal policing architecture here, subject to the primacy of the PSNI and the specific lead role for the Chief Constable in approving actions by the NCA and subject to accountability to the ombudsman reporting to the Policing Board. All those are issues that, I believe, we already have, and I do not see any way in which there would be any benefit from legislating in this place.

Mrs D Kelly: As the Minister will be aware, we all want to see an effective and accountable NCA operating as soon as possible. Given the Minister's previous comments, will he give us some indication of progress on those points with the Home Secretary?

Mr Ford: The issue has not been so much, as Mrs Kelly talks about, progress with the Home Secretary at this stage; progress with the Home Secretary was made several months ago and has been refined on a couple of occasions since. The issue now has to be to obtain progress with the two parties in this place that are not yet happy with the arrangements.

Terrorist Threat

3. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current level of terrorist activity, including the threat to the security forces and the general public, between now and Christmas. (AQO 4825/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the outset, I should say that terrorism is primarily a matter for the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable. I can advise, however, that the threat level in Northern Ireland remains at severe, which means that an attack is highly likely. There have been 14 attacks up to 14 October this year. Police officers, soldiers and prison officers remain the primary targets. It is clear, however, that the terrorists are not concerned about the safety of anyone. Unfortunately, we have also seen paramilitary groups executing their own perverse view of justice, with the callous and brutal murder of Kevin Kearney in north Belfast on 8 October. There is no place for that in our society, and I utterly condemn all such violent activity, including the appalling murder of Barry McCrory. I understand that the two men arrested last week in relation to an attack on a woman in east Belfast on 25 September have now been released on police bail pending further inquiries.

Murderous attacks, assaults, shootings, victimisation and intimidation by any paramilitary organisation cannot be justified. Neither unionist nor nationalist terrorists can be allowed to thwart the progress that Northern Ireland has made. There is no doubt that there would be more attacks were it not for the success of the security forces in disrupting and preventing them. Having met both the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence in the past week, I can also attest to the high level of cross-border cooperation. While the efforts of security forces on both sides of the border have contained the level of activity

and undoubtedly saved lives, that has not diminished the intent of these groups. Everyone in Northern Ireland must remain vigilant and report any information that they have either to the police or anonymously to the Crimestoppers charity.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that answer. In light of what he has just said and given what has taken place, what further discussions will he have with the police and the NIO to deal with further disruption and terrorist activity in the lead-up to Christmas?

Mr Ford: I have regular meetings with the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State to look at the issues of the interface between her responsibilities and mine in the justice field. However, the key issue must remain the support of the entire community for the work being done by the PSNI, extending to the provision of intelligence when people have any information that can assist the police and a robust standing together against those who would threaten us from whatever side.

Mr Swann: Can the Minister inform the House whether any of the guns or ammunition used in murders in the past four years have a history before 1998?

Mr Ford: The answer is that I cannot inform the House of that position. I suspect that it is a matter for Forensic Science NI to carry out such investigations and report to the courts at an appropriate time.

Mr A Maginness: Given the obvious danger from terrorists, particularly dissident republicans, does the Minister agree that those who engage in demonstrations and public protests divert resources from the fight against terrorism?

Mr Ford: As Mr Maginness hints, it is clearly the case that, when police officers are required in large numbers to deal with public disorder and a variety of demonstrations, it diverts officers from carrying out other duties. I would not stop where he stopped in respect of his concern about the activities of dissident republicans: it is clear that dissident unionists are also carrying out similar attacks and seeking to impose their will on communities across Northern Ireland. We need to ensure that police officers are deployed against both.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I should have pointed out that questions 7 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Human Trafficking

4. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the need to retain flexibility in the justice system in the battle against human trafficking. (AQO 4826/11-15)

Mr Ford: Human trafficking is a heinous crime that has a devastating toll on its victims. I am committed to making sure that we have a robust and effective system in place in Northern Ireland to prevent people from being trafficked and exploited, to protect victims and to pursue through the courts those who perpetrate this crime. I accept that that involves reviewing law and procedure and promoting changes as necessary. For instance, Members will be aware of the new offences that I introduced under the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the progress that my Department is making against the human trafficking action plan. I agree with the Member that the approach requires flexibility.

Ms Lo: Keeping in mind the importance of flexibility, does the Minister share my concerns that some aspects of Lord Morrow's private Member's Bill may reduce flexibility and, therefore, could be counterproductive in our attempts to address human trafficking?

2.30 pm

Mr Ford: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is no great secret that Lord Morrow and I have discussed aspects of the Bill, including those aspects which reduce flexibility around prosecution decisions, those around the automatic granting of immunity to victims and those around a mandatory minimum sentence. I have concerns about aspects of the Bill, but those are issues which I have discussed with Lord Morrow, which I suspect I will continue to discuss with Lord Morrow, and on which the Justice Committee, in particular, and the House, in general, will have an opportunity make up its mind.

Lord Morrow: It is interesting to note that the question is more to do with Lord Morrow's Bill than with what the Minister is doing or not doing. Bearing in mind that the Minister has all the flexibility that he claims to need at present, we have had two convictions, to date. De facto, it is legal now. Does the Minister accept that what he has got is simply not working and that it is time for something better?

Mr Ford: The fact that we can say that we have had only two convictions is clearly a matter of some concern, but we should also acknowledge that the number of cases which we believe we are talking about is very limited. If we looked merely at the conviction rates for some other offences, I am not sure whether we would say that we were being successful. They are there as a clear marker. The fact that we have had a guideline judgement with the case of Matyas Pis is an indication of how seriously the courts are taking cases.

However, as ever, I repeat the point that one of the key issues is that the police need information from members of the public; they need the public to report concerns that they have. If there are issues or matters that do not seem to be quite right, such as the number of people coming and going to houses, or people in a workplace who do not seem able to live their own life independently, they should be brought to the attention of the police. Ensuring that the community unites is the key issue.

Last week, I saw some very positive work in visits to Armagh college, Dromore High School and Regent House Grammar School. I have no doubt that many young people across society are learning the lessons and becoming aware, but we need to ensure that some older people become aware and report their concerns as well.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Can he outline how many different types of human trafficking there have been since he came into office and the reasons for trafficking?

Mr Ford: I can give the House the basic statistics, as they stand. Since the establishment of the national referral mechanism (NRM) in April 2009, until the start of October 2013, there were 104 referrals from Northern Ireland, of which 65 had positive decisions at the initial stage — the reasonable grounds stage — for acceptance into the

national referral mechanism, and 37 positive decisions were made at the conclusive grounds stage. A number of cases are pending at both levels. It means that, so far, only 37 people have been accepted into the NRM in that period of something more than four years, which slightly predates my appointment as Minister.

It is absolutely clear that significant work is being done. Last week, I had a meeting, on a North/South basis, with the Minister of Justice and Equality and a number of relevant agencies. That was at a seminar dealing with trafficking there. I also attended the regular meeting of the interdepartmental ministerial group led by the Home Office but, on this occasion, chaired by the Prime Minister, and the meetings that I just mentioned, at which I engaged with one college and two schools. So, there is clearly a significant effort being directed against trafficking across all of the jurisdictions of these islands, but, fundamentally, those who carry out that work are statutory bodies, and they require the support of the community to do it.

Legal Aid

5. Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Justice whether anyone seeking legal aid will be disadvantaged as a result of changes being brought forward. (AQO 4827/11-15)

Mr Ford: The reforms currently published for public consultation in relation to legal aid would see the rates of remuneration for Crown Court work being reduced overall by 45% for solicitors and 30% for counsel. That would bring the fees paid in Northern Ireland into line with the fees paid in England and Wales. The reforms would also remove the higher guilty plea 2 fees, which could act as a disincentive to the entry of an early guilty plea, and introduce new fees to cover omissions in the rules. On the basis that this is an adjustment to the fees paid to lawyers working in Crown Court cases and does not affect anyone's eligibility for legal aid, I am content that no applicant for legal aid will be disadvantaged.

The reforms being undertaken to civil legal aid will ensure that those who are eligible will continue to be provided with appropriate representation, paid for by the public purse. I have published proposals to introduce fixed fees for legal aid in civil cases, which will save £14 million annually — including £3 million in administration costs — and improve accountability. I have also proposed changes to legal aid funding for representation in civil cases, which will ensure that only the level of representation that is actually required is funded by legal aid. I am confident that those who are assisted by legal aid will continue to be able to obtain the level of representation that they need.

I have also published proposals to harmonise the financial eligibility tests for advice by way of representation and civil legal aid. Those proposals would deliver an estimated 8.2% reduction in eligibility for civil legal aid from 43.2% to 35% of the population. Although that will reduce the proportion of people in Northern Ireland who are eligible for legal aid, Members should note that in England and Wales only 28% of the population is eligible.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he guarantee that access to justice will not be compromised by any reform of legal aid?

Mr Ford: I can certainly assure Mr Boylan that, as I have assured the House and the Committee for Justice before, it is my ambition to not take issues out of scope for legal aid unless an alternative and better method can be provided. However, there is no doubt that the financial challenges that we face are placing significant pressure, to the point that current expenditure on legal aid means that I am having to make cuts in other aspects of departmental expenditure in this year. That is an issue that needs to be addressed. The key issue is to ensure that we maintain, as far as possible, access to the legal advice that individuals need, without necessarily funding adversarial appearances in court.

Mr McCarthy: I understand that, at the weekend, the Minister announced to the Law Society that he intends to have a further review of access to justice. Will he give the Assembly some further information on exactly what that will entail?

Mr Ford: I am glad that the Member referred to an announcement to the Law Society; I am not sure that all the members of the Law Society were entirely pleased with what they heard from me on Saturday morning, but that remains to be seen.

Following on from the access to justice review, which was carried out by Jim Daniell shortly after the devolution of justice powers, there are some issues that need to be further considered to underpin those reforms and to ensure that we continue to make the reforms to provide the best possible arrangements for legal aid and legal services across Northern Ireland. It is not something that will slow down the reform programme, because that cannot be slowed down.

We need to look at issues such as the possibility of making better use of advice agencies and alternative dispute resolution rather than, as I have just said, funding adversarial court appearances, and ensuring that we find better ways of resolving problems without always resorting to litigation in the first place. Those are the kinds of issues that I am hoping we will get some further work done on. I will make a formal statement to the Assembly at an appropriate stage.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for the responses that he has given so far. While there may not be a great deal of public sympathy for those who are at the higher end of the earnings scale in the legal profession, what consideration has he given to the impact that changes in legal aid will have on small solicitors' firms?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr Weir's point but I am not sure that it is my job, as Minister of Justice, to ensure the maintenance of a specific model of the provision of legal services. I noted, for example, that in the president's speech to the Law Society dinner, he referred to a solicitor and named a specific small village in County Tyrone. I suspect that most people in that village travel to the district town in order to get their groceries, and I am not sure that they can necessarily expect that there will be a one-man solicitor's practice in all cases in every village, even though they might wish it.

I want to see that people get access to advice. I am afraid that it is not my responsibility to ensure that the current model continues to be there. I wish to see that the current model of solicitors' firms across Northern Ireland continues in operation so that people have those opportunities, but

it simply cannot be assumed that it will be maintained without change, as other services are changed.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister been made aware of the concerns of many solicitors that the proposed cuts to the legal aid budget will reduce or minimise access to proper legal services for many people right across the North who are at the lower end of the income bracket and will, in fact, have a negative effect on society as a whole?

Mr Ford: I have to say to Mr McGlone and others that I am not in the process of reducing the budget for legal aid. I am reducing expenditure to get it down to the level of the budget; that is the fundamental challenge. Expenditure on legal aid has been running in the region of £100 million against a budget of £75 million every year since just before devolution. That position cannot continue.

On the issue of access, I repeat the point that I made in my original answer. Some 35% of the population of Northern Ireland will still be eligible for legal aid, as opposed to 28% in England and Wales, which is the nearest comparable jurisdiction. I believe that that is a significant statement of our desire to protect our people.

Twaddell Avenue

6. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on any discussions he has had with the Chief Constable regarding the ongoing breaches of the Parades Commission's determination of the protest at Twaddell Avenue. (AQO 4828/11-15)

Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist uimhir a sé. Question 5.

Mr Ford: I will happily answer question 6 for Mr McCann [Laughter.] Although, naturally, I have had general discussions with the police, I have not discussed specific policing decisions. That is because the policing of individual parades, protests and related disorder is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. As such, his accountability rests with the Policing Board. I have had no discussions with him regarding the ongoing breaches of the Parades Commission's determinations in respect of the protest at Twaddell Avenue.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight my concern at the recent call to increase protests, including the threat of civil disobedience. I encourage all those with influence to consider an alternative way forward to bring about a peaceful conclusion to the issue. It is vital that they show leadership and work with their communities and the police to ease tensions where they exist.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his correction. I was daydreaming. Will the Minister join with me in calling for everyone, including certain Members of the Assembly, to desist from further political confrontation with the PSNI on the streets of Belfast and to uphold the rule of law in keeping with the determination of the Parades Commission?

Mr Ford: I will happily repeat my comments in answer to Dr McDonnell's topical question. I believe that we all have a responsibility to encourage people to obey the law, to desist from confrontational activity and to ensure that we do not continue with the current £60,000-a-night expenditure on policing Twaddell Avenue and Ardoyne.

That is unnecessary and has significant opportunity costs compared with the use of those officers in normal policing duties. As I said, I hope that we will see a reduction in tension around the city centre, Woodvale and Ardoyne.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister give an assessment on the impact on community relations of the unveiling of a plaque to Shankill bomber Thomas Begley yesterday?

Mr Ford: Although I do my best to answer questions, an assessment of community relations lies with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and not with me. However, even in the context of what happened yesterday, it is clear that there was public disorder that had a policing cost.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 10 and 13 have been withdrawn. We begin with topical questions.

Lisburn: Sport

1. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what additional support is planned this year for the sporting organisations in Lisburn, given that, as she will well know, Lisburn was awarded the accolade of European city of sport this year, and we are rightfully proud of all its sporting organisations. (AQT 251/11-15)

Ms Ni Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

I thank the Member for his question. A bid process will see the City of Lisburn Racquets Club receive additional money. Additional money has also been allocated to Salto Gymnastics Club through the governing body for gymnastics. I have had approaches and will certainly look at opportunities around soccer, boxing and other sports.

Attracting the Chinese male gymnastics team, which is ranked first in the world, to Lisburn was no mean feat. I have absolutely no doubt that Lisburn will be banking on that in order to attract additional investment in the future.

2.45 pm

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that answer. It is recognised that Salto pulled off one of the key achievements from the Olympic Games in getting the Chinese gymnasts there. Unfortunately, Salto is a victim of its own success. It is bursting at the seams and has plans to develop that facility further. Will the Minister and her Department support that extension, which will benefit all the people of Northern Ireland, further than Lisburn itself?

Ms Ni Chuilín: The Member is right in saying that the facilities at Salto are an exemplar across the island when it comes to gymnastics. I am happy to meet representatives of the Salto gym with the Member, members of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and Sport NI to look at the potential expansion of the facilities at Salto. As yet, there has not been a request to do that, but I anticipate one. I have been at the gym on several occasions; it was flagged up to me that it has a waiting list that it cannot facilitate, and it is not happy to be in that situation. However, I am happy to meet the Member and a delegation from the gym to see what we can do.

Mr Deputy Speaker: At the beginning, I informed Members that questions 10 and 13 had been withdrawn.

That refers to the oral questions. Topical question 6 has been withdrawn.

City of Culture: Legacy Plan

2. Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she can confirm that the City of Culture legacy plan will be brought forward this year and further confirm that Derry City Football Club will be included in the IFA subregional stadium development plan. (AQT 252/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is certainly a theme of local politics emerging in topical questions. I appreciate that all politics is local.

We were very successful in securing an additional £2 million, as part of the monitoring round, for the City of Culture's legacy fund. That is important, particularly when you are looking at the legacy, and there has been much in the media about the legacy. However, our focus — the entire Executive, through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) — has always been on addressing opportunities, and there is no better opportunity than tackling poverty and social exclusion. I am happy that that will happen. The other facilities — the Brandywell, the Showgrounds and the rest as part of that legacy — will be included in that. We are working with the council on the production of a robust legacy plan, and we will bring our own in addition to that. I have no doubt that, right up to the last minute, I will hear from the people of the city and the surrounding communities about what they would like to see the money invested in.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr McCartney for a supplementary, and I encourage the Member to ask one question only.

Mr McCartney: Well spotted, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for her answer. I will ask her one question. We heard this morning, and the Minister alluded to it, that the Executive have, through DCAL, ring-fenced £2 million for the legacy process. Can she confirm today how that will be used and, in particular, how it will advance the Brandywell and the Foyle valley master plan?

Ms Ní Chuilín: With not just the £2 million from DCAL but the £3 million from Derry City Council, a quare dent — as we say in Belfast — will certainly be put into the Foyle valley master plan and help to address one of the legacy projects that has been flagged up in the city. It is really important to use opportunities through sport and physical activity, through the arts, through community development, through health, and through social development and the rest to make sure that we leave a good footprint. I believe that the Foyle valley project is one of those. I look forward to seeing how it rolls out.

Boxing

3. Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she believes there was good uptake for the tranche of funding that was available for local boxing clubs, for which the deadline has recently passed. (AQT 253/11-15)

Following a great weekend for boxing in Northern Ireland, Belfast in particular, I am sure that the Minister will

congratulate Carl Frampton as he heads on to greater things.

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, I concur with the Member's statement on Carl Frampton, and that goes for all the other boxers who succeeded at the weekend. I believe that the wins that they achieved and the support that they got from right across the community was probably unprecedented. Many other sports can learn from that.

There was huge uptake. I do not have the figures with me, but it will come as no surprise to the Member that the demand far outweighs our funds, so we need to look at ways to support that. Certainly, the uptake has been huge. As the Member — and other Members who, I am sure, will raise the issue today — will know, the state of facilities in boxing clubs are probably the worst across sport.

We aim to ensure not only that we invest and that facilities are fit for purpose, but that all other Departments and bodies have an opportunity to contribute. That includes local government. Some councils have done great work. Other councils have expressed an interest. I am keen to ensure that that deadline is not a cut-off for boxing forever. We need to see what money we have to try to meet the need.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her answer. Now that the deadline has passed and we are in a period of assessment, when does the Minister expect to see delivery on the ground?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, most clubs, if not all, have received certain minor capital for equipment, such as head guards and bags. I anticipate that, by December 2015, not only will a lot of the technical assessment for capital needs have commenced and be well under way, but some will be nearing completion. I am still hopeful that, even at this late stage, where city councils have boxing clubs in their areas, they will also help them, maybe contribute some funding and look at a better way to deliver some of those much-needed facilities.

Sport: Subregional Development

4. Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what process she would envisage that would allow sporting clubs outside the three main sporting bodies to, on a subregional basis, take advantage of modernisation and improvement programmes. (AQT 254/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, as the Member will be aware, the IFA has subregional facilities. It is in the process of looking at a facilities development plan. That will be completed and presented to me. Based on what is there, I will make a final decision at the end. It is really important to ensure that local clubs, be they small or big, have themselves in a state of readiness. As the Member will also be aware, not everybody who puts a plan forward will get funding.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. Can she give the House the fullest assurance that Derry City Football Club will not be disadvantaged by playing in the League of Ireland and that it will become part of a funding stream in the current comprehensive spending review period?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that the Member is aware of the response that I gave to his Foyle colleague Raymond McCartney, which is that we have already submitted £2

million towards Daisyfield and the Showgrounds as part of the overall Foyle valley programme. Derry City Football Club, along with many other football clubs, has met and will continue to meet the IFA to ensure that its facilities are certainly on the list for approval.

NI Events Company

5. Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to confirm that the NI Events Company investigation is complete, to state when the findings will be published and to clarify whether the Department intends to reinstate any of the events. (AQT 255/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will be aware that the Events Company was transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in April 2010. A report is being compiled on the findings of that investigation. Basically, as far as I am concerned, the Events Company has been transferred to DETI along with the Tourist Board. There are events here that we need to look at collectively in the Executive. There is no better example than 2013 of what we can do to hold events on a world stage. I want to see the conclusion of the investigation and the publication of the report.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Can the Minister assure me that those events will happen right across the North rather than just in the two main cities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given the impact that the events have on tourism and, indeed, the local economy, a lot of people are concerned that areas outside Belfast and Derry city may not be given an opportunity to host them. I would say to those people that there is absolutely nothing to stop them bringing forward projects now. I would like to see the report published to make sure that the lessons that need to be learned are learned and that we bring forward collectively those opportunities that need to be progressed in that way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As pointed out at the beginning, question 6 has been withdrawn. Mr Declan McAleer is not in his place. Mr Alex Attwood is not in his place. Mr Daithí McKay is not in his place. Mr Ian McCrea is in his place.

Mr I McCrea: I was not expecting that.

Pipe Bands

10. Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is aware that the Northern Ireland pipe band scene has had very good results during this piping season and to comment on how that success could be maintained next season. (AQT 260/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am delighted that the Member was in his place, because he asked a very valid question about pipe bands. Some of the pipe bands that I visited and witnessed this year have enjoyed a lot of success, and rightly so, because that has not come without a lot of hard work. I have no doubt that that success will continue next year and that DCAL, the Arts Council and the Ulster-Scots Agency will play their parts in ensuring that that success is realised.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the —. My apologies, Ian. You have a supplementary question to ask. It is the least that we could do.

Mr I McCrea: I think so. Will the Minister join me in congratulating a young fella called Matthew Wenlock who became the under-16 world champion at — if I get this correct — the world solo drumming championships at the weekend?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Of course I will join you in congratulating him. Such competitions are an opportunity for people not just to compete but to excel and to try to improve their skills and move from one category to another. I admire anybody who plays a musical instrument, regardless of whether they are in a pipe band, a marching band, a pop band or a traditional band. It is absolutely no mean feat. So, I extend my congratulations to Matthew, and I hope that he and others succeed next year.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, that concludes topical questions. We will now move on to questions for oral answer. As previously pointed out, questions 10 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Libraries

1. Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the strategy of Libraries NI is delivering an uptake in usage in areas where libraries have been closed. (AQO 4837/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI's strategy for delivering increases in library usage is set out in its 2013-14 business plan. Libraries NI will measure participation in a wide range of activities, events and programmes, as well as through book usage, library membership and other activities.

Due to an incomplete dataset in Libraries NI's 10-year-old ELFNI computer system, it has not been possible to identify with sufficient certainty the changes in usage in areas where libraries have been closed. The introduction of Libraries NI's new computer system, the E2, over the coming year will provide, among many other improvements, a complete postcode dataset for the analysis of library usage in the future.

Mrs Dobson: The Minister will agree with me that libraries play an essential role in our local communities. She is on record as saying that she disagreed with library closures under the previous Minister of Culture. Does she, therefore, plan to reprofile spending in her Department to build up those vital services again, including Gilford library in my constituency?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Perhaps the Member is not aware of this — I am happy to furnish her with the figures — but I have reprofiled the budget across all the ALBs to ensure that libraries have additional money. Not only that but we have tried to balance out the proposals for reduced opening hours to make sure that library closures are totally avoided. I am happy to provide the statistics to the Member.

3.00 pm

I am aware that great lengths have been gone to, particularly by working with the local community development group in Gilford, to make sure that people avail themselves of every opportunity for better library usage in the area. Libraries have held mother and toddler groups, helped with job skills and given other support right across the board, particularly in rural areas. Libraries can be sustained only where there is proper usage. Therefore,

I would welcome anything that the Member and others can do to make sure that our libraries are protected and that their usage increases.

Mrs McKevitt: Libraries NI has invested heavily in mobile units, but has there been an increase in their usage in areas where there have been library closures to facilitate those library users using the new E2 programme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said to Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson, we do not have exact data on increase in usage or even any profile or complexion of library usage through mobiles in the areas where libraries were closed. As the Member will be aware, a stage 1 review was proposed into the mobile services, but anecdotal evidence is that there is greater use of mobile services. E2 will come on board next year, and we anticipate that it will lead to increased usage and will particularly help people who have dependants or are isolated. We need to make sure that we bring the library to them as much as possible, but it is important to make sure that people who are really committed to their libraries have every opportunity to have a service in their area.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister can correct me if I picked her up wrong, but I think that she said that no data is available on mobile libraries. Is the Minister not concerned about that, given that a lot of the figures are based on lack of usage of libraries and, indeed, the promotion of the usage of mobile libraries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are figures there, but breakdowns by postcode, gender, whether people have dependants or children, and background are not available. The system at the minute is well over 10 years old and not fit for purpose. That is why E2 has been procured and brought in, and it will provide the kind of breakdown that we need.

We also need to future-proof stock, decide what type of stock to buy and decide how many people need Kindles, but we do not have the detail. However, we have details of how many people are using mobile libraries at the minute and the demand for future use. The key thing is to make sure that people not only have membership of their local library but continue to use it and encourage others to do so, because libraries that have not been used and cannot be sustained will be harder to sustain.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister provide an update on the seven libraries that were originally identified for closure?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A lot of progress has been made, and I pay tribute to Libraries NI and its board and staff for that. The Member may be aware of the new library in Draperstown and the partnership with the local community association there. That library has now been saved and is open, and we have looked at that model, particularly in rural areas. There are also advanced plans to improve facilities at Carnlough and Killyleagh.

As the result of a lot of hard work at the quarterly meetings, it was announced on 17 October that the remaining seven libraries that were earmarked for potential closure are currently sustainable and should remain open. The only caveat is that a further review on viability will take place for Killyleagh and Greystones libraries only, as the level of usage in those libraries, although they still look sustainable, continues to be a concern. Unless that sustainability and the numbers and usage improve, we will come back to a situation in which those libraries will not

be deemed viable unless more people are accessing their services and creating demand.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Declan McAleer is not in his place.

Boxing Strategy

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the boxing strategy. (AQO 4839/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since my last update, which was in May this year, Sport NI, in conjunction with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA), selected four suppliers to provide boxing equipment to clubs. An independent technical team was appointed to carry out surveys of the premises of boxing clubs where there is a need for capital works. To date, £166,000 has been allocated for the provision of equipment, which is being issued to clubs. It is anticipated that delivery of such equipment will be completed for all clubs by the end of the year.

The independent technical team has completed 65 on-site surveys, and 26 survey reports have been submitted to Sport NI for consideration. Submission of the other reports is ongoing. Subsequently, a call for formal applications for capital awards was made on 10 September.

The Member will be aware that the IABA club development manager has been holding one-to-one meetings with some of the clubs. The Member may also be aware that a number of district councils have been proactive in identifying premises that could be used to accommodate boxing clubs.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her answer. In light of the need to maximise the value of spend for boxing to ensure that it gets the most out of this, and in light of the concentration of clubs in certain areas, particularly Belfast, what actions is the Department taking to encourage the sharing of facilities and ensuring that underused facilities that are under local government or central government control are identified as venues?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, the Member is right: there are huge challenges for us in trying to meet the needs of some boxing clubs. Some local councils have been excellent in trying to provide some of the underused facilities that they have under their control and match them with identified need, particularly in boxing. But, not all councils are involved in that, and I encourage the Member's own council and others to become involved, because it is a valuable exercise. There are huge opportunities, particularly ahead of the review of public administration (RPA) and all the changes and challenges that that will bring with it.

I have no register of central government facilities. I am keen to find out if there are any, and, if so, how they can be used, if at all.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. What assistance was given to boxing clubs to maximise how they availed themselves of the boxing investment strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said to the Member who asked the previous question, a club manager from the Irish Amateur Boxing Association met a lot of the boxing clubs, supported by Sport NI. They have been working with the clubs on a range of one-to-one issues to ensure that, for

example, they avail of funding for small equipment. They have also been looking at other needs, such as making sure that clubs have a funding strategy, going through the process of assessment on the bigger capital needs of clubs and trying to give them advice. That assistance has been welcomed. The feedback that I have had from most clubs is that they value the one-to-one work, because they feel that it was probably one of the areas where there was a gap.

As I said, there are still huge opportunities, particularly with local government and this investment in boxing, to yield better results for a sport that, despite its success, and the weekend that we had, has facilities that are not fit for purpose.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her responses. Given the acknowledgement that boxing clubs across Northern Ireland hit the key element of the Programme for Government, namely greater participation in sport, has the Minister been able to ascertain how many boxing clubs we have and how many are in need of urgent modernisation programmes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are well over 60 boxing clubs across the North. It would be fair to say that the majority need capital support. That need varies from some support to a lot of support. You could count on one hand the number of clubs that do not need any support. Without waxing lyrical, we continually praise the work and the product of boxers in the Assembly. We continue to acknowledge their commitment and work, and how they serve as role models for children and young people in our communities.

We have to get behind the sport to make sure that clubs have facilities that are not only fit for purpose but will attract more youngsters to the sport. Despite the success in the sport and what boxing clubs have done for our communities and families, I could not blame any parent who walks into some of our boxing facilities for being tempted to walk straight back out again. We really need to get behind the sport and make investment where it is needed. Boxing needs that investment.

Mr McGimpsey: Does the Minister believe that a facilitation process between Sandy Row Boxing Club and the boxing authorities will result in the club and the wider community having the confidence to go forward with her strategy, in the belief and certainty that they will be free from sectarian and racial abuse?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am waiting for the report to come back from the independent panel. I am glad that Sandy Row Boxing Club representatives met the panel. I am not sure how many times they met, but I believe that the discussions were robust and that there is certainly a desire to make sure that the youngsters involved at Sandy Row — albeit in dwindling numbers — have opportunities like others.

I absolutely, utterly and unequivocally condemn sectarianism in sport, regardless of where it happens. The Member knows in his heart that, of all sports, boxing has had the fewest complaints. However, if it happens once, it is once too often. I would like Sandy Row to be involved in this. I would like the club to move forward and take every opportunity that becomes available to get the facilities that not only the club needs but the people of south Belfast deserve.

Ulster Canal

4. Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the current funding position on the re-opening of the Ulster canal. (AQO 4840/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Work by Waterways Ireland on the restoration of the Ulster canal has been solely focused on the section from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. The project will be advanced in line with available resources. The Ulster canal interagency group has been tasked to examine all possible options for financing the project. DCAL economists are reviewing the business case to update the estimated costs and identify social as well as economic benefits for the first section of the canal. The Ulster canal interagency group is exploring funding options with the Special EU Programmes Body.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome the Minister's continuing commitment to the Ulster canal, particularly the section from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. However, one of the difficulties that it faces is an absence of funding. Will the Minister provide more information on potential funding options for completing the work on that section of the canal?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The work of the interagency group is focused not just on funding options but on what we can do with current available funding. It is really important that we look at the Ulster canal with a view to how we can open up waterways to improve tourism and the local economy. It is important that we get started on the restoration of the Ulster canal in that area because it has experienced a lack of investment for decades.

We are looking not just towards the Irish Government, within DCAL and towards Europe but at other opportunities, possibly through the Lottery Heritage Fund and many others to see whether we can get this started by looking at options to bring the work forward, rather than waiting until all the money is in. We can do that only on the basis of secured funding. Once that happens, I will be happy to make a statement to the House that will be a bit of good news that the Member and other Members for that area have been waiting to hear for a long time.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. Will she tell us how much the overall project was estimated to cost, based on the business case, and what income it projected?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Overall, it goes into tens of millions of pounds. I believe that the business case needs to be updated, and that will be part of discussions involving me, Minister Deenihan, and Minister McGinley. Some of the work that is being done by DCAL economists is bringing a fresh approach to the economic appraisal. We are sharing that with our Irish Government colleagues and the interagency group. That is because I believe that, rather than waiting for all the money to be secured at once, we need to look at the potential for phased approaches. It is good news that we now have full planning permission across all the councils and from our Planning Service here.

We now need to look at what capital moneys are available, what we can do and our plan to secure additional funds for that area. As I said to Phil Flanagan, it is really important — I am sure that the Member is more aware of this than I

am — that we get parts of that canal opened and try to get some construction work done on it.

3.15 pm

Mr Byrne: Can this issue be raised at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council? What potential does she expect could accrue to the areas of Fermanagh and Tyrone in future tourism?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member should take comfort in knowing that this is always raised at the North/South Ministerial Council. Certainly, within the waterways sectoral aspect of DCAL's North/South arrangements, it is constantly brought up. The key here is to look at what we can do now for rural communities and what moneys are available. I appreciate that, when the Irish Government said that they would fully fund the project, they were in different economic circumstances. However, they still remain committed to doing something.

In DCAL, I am looking at a new economic appraisal to see what the real costs are and what parts of the work I could try to start, possibly in conjunction with Ministers Deenihan and McGinley. There is a lot of expectation around the project, and rightly so, no more so than among the people who live and work in the surrounding area and those who are waiting for work on the restoration of the canal.

Ms Lo: Parts of the UK and many other countries have reinvented canals as tourist facilities and attractions. What lessons does the Minister intend to adopt from other people's experiences?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, we regularly receive reports from Waterways Ireland about tourist potential. The royal canal has brought great potential. There are festivals across all the canals and waterways the length and breadth of this island. Unfortunately, those are some of the very few opportunities that people who live in rural communities near waterways have of generating a local economy. So the tourist potential is absolutely huge. Not only is it huge for people who live on this island; it is huge for those who want to visit here and travel. There is big interest, particularly in Europe, in canals and waterways. It is incumbent on us to do what we can to get the project financed. We need to make a start on it. We do not have all the funds yet, but it is time to make a start on it rather than sit and wait on free money coming. People who are looking for tourists and have a tourist product to offer and people who are willing and able to work look to us for opportunities to get this moving. I think that is what it could do.

Motorsport Facilities

5. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any discussions she has had in relation to developing a purpose-built motorsport track facility, suitable for hosting international events for cars and motorcycles. (AQO 4841/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Up to yesterday, I had not received a request from any individual, group or organisation to discuss the development of a purpose-built motorsports track facility. I am committed to sustaining motorsport here, and I recently met Ministers Kennedy and Foster to explore opportunities around safety in motorsport and the continued funding of motorsport into future years. Through partnership and collaborative

working, DCAL will ensure that positive outcomes will continue to be delivered for motorsport. Moreover, DCAL's interest in road racing remains focused on encouraging the sport to improve the safety of competitors and spectators.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she recognise the need for such a provision? She should consider the huge interest that there is in motorsport in Northern Ireland and the need to reduce risks, especially in the road racing of motorbikes, and increase the safety of spectators at motorsport events? Furthermore, has the Minister considered the Maze site as an option for such a motorsport facility? It would be an excellent facility and an excellent site.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have received no facilities development strategy from the governing body, which is 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group, as the Member knows. It is on the basis of governing bodies bringing forward strategies that the Department, through Sport NI, decides to give funding. I have not looked at any site for that purpose because the 2&4 Wheel group has not even revisited its current facilities plan. It has not asked me to assess the need for a purpose-built stand-alone facility for motorsport. It is happy with the three outlets that it has at the minute. On that basis, I have not given any thought to purpose-built facilities. I am not really sure that the governing body has, either. I met it recently, and it did not present that to me as something that it wished to take forward.

Mr Swann: The Minister mentioned the 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group and investment. However, the current Sport Matters strategy outlines the potential for greater private investment on the back of increased demand for motorsport to build a new facility. Is the Minister looking into that at all?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The short answer is no. Investment will be in the performance of the athletes involved, the work of the governing body and the improvements that it has to make. That investment will continue. I sense that there is a bit of a lobby coming on, but the governing body has not spoken to me about it. It had an opportunity to do so. It would certainly like additional improvements to its current facilities, but it has not brought forward a proposal for a stand-alone motorsport facility.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she tell us how the funding provided by Sport NI to the 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group under its performance focus programme will assist the development of the sport?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the performance focus programme, Sport NI has agreed to provide over £300,000 over the period 2013-17 for the development of motorsport across the North. It has identified priorities, including the modernisation of the sport, particularly the development of performance, talent and coaching. It has also identified the need for a full-time development manager and high-performance coaching officer. Those are several ways in which the investment from DCAL to Sport NI can go to the 2&4 Wheel group to help its performance and focus for the future development of facilities.

Community Relations

6. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how she has promoted good community

relations, as well as the interests of the whole community, whilst discharging her ministerial responsibilities.
(AQO 4842/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. DCAL is committed to ensuring that it fulfils its duties under the NI Act 1998 in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. Sport, arts and creativity and linguistic diversity make a valuable contribution to good relations and the creation of a shared and better future. An example of that is the cultural awareness strategy. The implementation of the strategy has seen the Ulster council of the GAA and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland engage in positive dialogue to deliver joint relations events in March of this year at Magee campus in Derry. Plans for a second good relations event are well under way.

Derry City Council and the City of Culture programme included the tattoo and the fleadh, which successfully included and celebrated the whole community. I was there to see both first-hand. The organisers worked with the community in the city to include Irish, Ulster-Scots and minority community traditions. As well as that, the Líofoa initiative makes Irish accessible to people from every background. The Irish language belongs to us all and is a vital part of our shared cultural heritage. Foras na Gaeilge funds an Irish language officer post in the East Belfast Mission, and DCAL officials have met the mission to discuss how we can assist with its work. The agencies of the North/South Language Body have undertaken joint projects in the Irish and Ulster-Scots communities. The agencies delivered showcase events to coincide with the Olympic torch relay. The young ambassadors programme involved eight young people from the USA and Canada. The Arts Council's Re-imaging Communities programme between 2005 and 2011 invested over £3.3 million in 155 projects that transformed communities by removing images and replacing them with more positive images that reflected the views of all of the community. The Irish Football Association, through its Football for All campaign, has introduced measures to address sectarianism in soccer. An IFA community relations department has been established, and a community relations officer has been appointed to work with clubs, officials and supporters.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's two minutes are up.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The intercultural arts strategy creates avenues for minority ethnic communities to access arts and participate in them. The strategy uses arts to develop community cohesion, increase awareness of diversity, develop good relations and tackle racism, and a total of £300,000 from lottery funding has been committed to the programme over the next three years.

Mr Deputy Speaker: After that comprehensive answer, does the Member have a supplementary question?

Mr Allister: Do I get a comprehensive one? As the Minister is Her Majesty's Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland and a Minister of the crown on a 24/7 basis and, therefore, subject to the constraints and obligations of the ministerial code at all times, why, this summer, did she see fit to align herself with partisan protests against expressions of British culture in Northern Ireland and be present on several occasions —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Allister: — when such matters took place?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will ask the Member to sit down if he does not ask a question that relates to the previous one.

Mr Allister: With respect, I am asking why, if she is subject to the ministerial code, she did not abide by it during in the summer —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will resume his seat, please.

Mr Allister: — and instead engaged in partisan actions. That is very pertinent to the question.

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I have consistently said, the Member is consistently silly. He provides nothing to the House but divisive politics. He has done absolutely nothing for community relations or building good or better relations and reconciliation. He has an absolute brass neck to question my adherence to the ministerial code, which belongs to this place. The Member, despite all his alleged expertise of knowing Standing Orders inside out, has not asked a question that is factually right and pertinent to the question that he asked in the first place. If he has any difficulty doing so, I am happy to sit down with him and show him how it is done.

Mr Lyttle: What proposals has the Minister put to OFMDFM for the cross-community sports programme that was announced as part of the OFMDFM Together: Building a United Community strategy in May this year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The £2 million that was secured in the most recent Executive meeting will happen either through monitoring rounds or through Together: Building a United Community funds, which look at the Foyle valley programme that my colleague Raymond McCartney mentioned. We are also looking at specific programmes on access for disabilities, and we are talking to some of the sports bodies, mainly through Sport NI, to look at the potential for others. I could happily spend every penny of that on sport, and I am happy to do so. I heard the Minister of Finance and Personnel talk about the need to see projects that can be brought forward. Despite some of the rigid criteria that have been applied to accessing those other moneys, I am looking outside the box for potential opportunities. Access to sport for people with disabilities is one example on which, I believe, the House will join together in saying that that is money well spent.

Assembly Business

Topical Questions

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek some clarity about topical questions, when a Minister says that a question has already been tabled in questions for oral answer. A case in point is that Ian Milne asked a question earlier about the terms of reference for the investigation into child abuse. Question 1 of questions for oral answer was about the number of meetings the Justice Minister had had with the Health Minister. The Member asking a topical question can assume neither that the other Member will be in their place at the appropriate time nor what the Minister's answer will be. Indeed, when the Minister answered Ms Fearon's question, he made no reference to the importance of the terms of reference or what input the Department would have on them. So we have to be careful. We do not want duplication, but Ministers have to be careful that they answer the questions that they are asked.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will know, of course, that it is entirely up to the Minister how he or she answers a question. The whole concept of topical questions is under review by the Speaker, and I imagine that, at the next meeting, we will talk about Members being absent for topical questions.

Mr McCartney: Further to that point of order, I have no issue with a Minister who does not want to answer a question, but I do not think that Ministers can be permitted to say that they are not answering a certain question but will answer it during questions for oral answer and then not do so. I do not think that that can be permitted.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As I said, the Member's views will be considered. Of course we are striving to improve ways in which topical questions do not overlap with oral questions. I can assure you that the Speaker is giving a lot of detail to that.

3.30 pm

Ministerial Statement

Prison Reform: Owers Report

Business resumed.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, your statement refers to major changes in the workforce that have taken place over the past year and a half. On the back of those changes and other issues, such as the completion of the exit scheme and the payment of the environmental allowance to quite a number of officers who are not in receipt of it, how do you assess the morale of staff at present?

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Clearly, the issue of staff morale is an important one, but, again, as I do not have direct line management responsibility for the staff in question, it is difficult for me to make the assessment. As I said earlier, it is clear that, when going through a programme of reform such as this, there will inevitably be difficulties with staff. It is not unique to the Prison Service, and I know that other public agencies have had similar difficulties, as, indeed, have private contractors, when changes are made to the way we operate. However, I believe that we have seen a significant change in the reform structure. We have seen opportunities for staff to gain qualifications. We have seen movement forward to make opportunities available for all of them to engage in relevant training programmes, whether they are the very new staff or those who are progressing through different grades. We have seen staff who have wished to transfer into the main grades from prisoner escorting and custody services. All those things, I believe, show that morale is not as bad as it is sometimes represented, but I acknowledge Mr Anderson's point that we need to ensure that we keep morale at the highest possible level.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. The reform programme, as the Minister outlined, is at a halfway point. I acknowledge that there have been positive changes, but Anne Owers said in her final report that piecemeal and incremental change would not be enough to bring about the desired changes envisaged in her final report and that only fundamental change would do so. Does the Minister agree with me that, with only nine of the recommendations signed off on, we are still at the piecemeal stage of the process?

Mr Ford: I am afraid I cannot agree with Mr Lynch on that point. I indicated earlier that we have nine signed off at the halfway point and nine further expected to be signed off at the December meeting of the oversight group. That is effectively halfway at a little over halfway through the time. I also indicated, on the scale of the reforms that are being proposed, that, inevitably, many of them will take time and we cannot expect early delivery of a significant number of them. That is because it is not a piecemeal programme. We are talking about issues in the programme that are of fundamental importance in changing the culture of the Prison Service and ensuring that our prisons operate more effectively. So, I cannot agree with the description that it is piecemeal. It is a substantial reform programme, but the important thing is to keep the impetus going so that we deliver on all of the programme as intended.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I was reading through the statement, and I see that considerable emphasis has been placed on people in prison requiring support with addiction issues. I also see reference to the Prison Service and PSNI initiative at Maghaberry, where they have joined forces to reduce the supply and demand of drugs in the prison. Will the Minister give us some indication of the amount of drugs seized at the prison in recent times? Clearly, unless they cut off supply, it will be a continuing issue.

Mr Ford: At this point, I cannot give Mr McGlone statistics, but I will happily write to him and give him the statistics on recent seizures. It is absolutely clear that the change in emphasis — the move to intelligence-led searching, rather than routine searching — has made a difference and that good work is being done, as I highlighted, including arrests last week. That shows that we can make a difference, but we need to ensure that we apply both the initiative that the PSNI is working on to deal with the smuggling and the educational aspects, working with our healthcare providers to ensure that we tackle both the supply of drugs and the demand for drugs. I believe that we are likely to see progress in the coming months, but clearly it is a significant issue. It has been an issue for some years, and it will require a lot of attention.

Mr B McCrea: Following up on the point about drug addiction, is there any reason why we cannot have routine drug testing of all inmates in prison? Surely that would be the easiest way to have intelligence-led confiscation of drugs.

Mr Ford: I am afraid that the question almost contradicted itself. Talking about routine and then talking about “intelligence-led” work shows the contradictions between the two possible approaches. For example, there has been routine drug testing on people entering and leaving prisons, including for home leave. That has proved to be not particularly effective, but the key issue is to make it intelligence-led where there is believed to be a risk. It is clear that some prisoners are more vulnerable than others, and we need to ensure that we take action, led by the intelligence, to ensure that we deal with the drugs problem. So, I entirely agree with the point that Mr McCrea makes about an intelligence-led approach, but that is not the same thing as a routine approach that is the same for everybody.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline what additional intervention education programmes he envisages being available at HMP Magilligan?

Mr Ford: The details of the education programme for Magilligan will be announced shortly as we look at the wider issues of prison reform. The concentration in the statement was on the work being done around Hydebank, making it Hydebank college, but it is absolutely clear that we need to build on our education programmes for all prisoners in all three prisons, not just for the young offenders in Hydebank. There are clearly issues there that are directly related to employment opportunities as part of rehabilitation.

We have seen some good work being done in the workshops and in the education service in Magilligan in recent years, despite the fact that the physical infrastructure is very poor. The reality is that it will not be easy, in the funding circumstances that we have, to replace those workshops in the near future. However, we have

seen good work being done by the staff there, and we will build on that as we enhance the training of staff so that they can carry out their work better with prisoners.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and his determination to complete the recommendations of the Owers report as soon as possible. What has been done in regard to the initiative that was announced in June, specifically the passport to employment? What will it deliver?

Mr Ford: One of the key issues that has been identified for a long time, which helps to rehabilitate prisoners, is giving them a better chance of obtaining employment when they leave, alongside issues such as housing and supportive personal relationships, especially with families.

The passport to employment looks at three aspects. One is giving the opportunity for the prisoner to record in a daily diary the issues that they do around soft skills learning. There is a further issue about ensuring that they get regular feedback on that file from staff. There is also the issue about looking at a portfolio to include certificates and building on the CV, where NIACRO is assisting the Prison Service, to ensure that it can present something to show that, during somebody's time in prison, they have not been merely out of the community but have been learning in the prison and building up skills that will help towards employability. It ties in very much with the work that is also being done looking at some private sector employers who are keen to provide employment opportunities in prisons. We have opportunities developing there, building on some good work done, in particular by some businesses in England and Wales, and looking at how those businesses might also work in Northern Ireland. It is all part of providing prisoners with something more constructive to do while they are in prison and having a proper record of it that is then validation for taking to employers when they leave.

Executive Committee Business

Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

That the Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The sea fish industry scheme forms part of the package of strategic assistance that I announced for the sea fish catching sector earlier this year. The first quarter of 2013 saw unusual weather conditions in the Irish Sea that kept many vessels in port. That came at a time when we were encouraging the fleet to adopt highly selective fishing gears and to accept the challenge of reducing fish discards under the reformed common fisheries policy. It was appropriate, therefore, to look at the fleet's needs in a strategic way and, at the same time, to offer some immediate encouragement in recognition of changes that the fleet had already made to its practices. As well as this scheme, assistance is being provided towards compliance with EU vessel monitoring rules. The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) remains open for owners who wish to modernise their vessels to become more efficient. Assistance is also available under the EFF for improving vessel safety and safety training.

The reformed common fisheries policy commits fishing fleets to end the practice of discarding unwanted fish at sea. We will build on the good work carried out on reducing catches of cod in the prawn fleet to minimise the unwanted by-catch of other species. My Department is drafting a proposal that combines a research programme on gear selectivity with financial assistance for the fleet to adopt new gears. My aim is to achieve as much progress as possible over the next two years so that, when the landing obligation comes into operation for our prawn fleet in 2016, the fleet is in the best position possible.

The harbour and landing dues scheme has been deliberately targeted at vessels that are most likely to have been affected by the poor weather conditions at the start of the year. The scheme will allow the Department to pay grant aid to the owners of vessels that are fewer than 27 metres in length that have fished for 25 days in the current calendar year. That excludes the three largest vessels engaged in fishing for pelagic species, that is, mackerel and herring. The pelagic sector is the most profitable sector of the fleet. There is no indication that those vessels experienced the same problems as vessels fishing in the cod recovery zone for demersal species.

The requirement to fish for at least 25 days is to ensure that only active vessels receive grant and that vessels that have made no attempt to fish are not rewarded. The scheme launched eight months into the year, and, therefore, it is not onerous for an active vessel to achieve the 25-day requirement. Grant is being paid at an aid rate equivalent to 70% of the berthing and landing dues paid to harbour authorities by vessel owners in 2012. To quickly pay a grant to vessels in need that is in proportion to their activity, the only realistic option is to use the previous year as a basis. Generally, harbour and landing dues vary pro rata to landings. Therefore, they reflect activity and the

likely impact of adverse conditions in 2013. A contribution of 70% partially reflects the fact that 2012 had the highest level of landings in the past five years.

To provide assistance within a reasonable time, the scheme has been designed to fall within the scope of the EU de minimis state aid rules for the fisheries sector. Under those rules, no undertaking can receive more than €30,000 over a three-year period. Therefore, under the scheme, payments to a single undertaking will be capped at that level. The scheme also includes other necessary conditions to ensure that all aid complies with those rules.

The scheme became operational on 2 September this year. Invitations were sent to all 367 vessels in our fleet. As of 17 October, 155 applications had been received and 120 claims, worth £354,000, had been paid. I anticipate that the remainder will be paid by the end of October, subject to the provision of any additional information required from the applicants. I estimate that the final amount of grant to be awarded under the scheme will be approximately £400,000.

I believe that this assistance is important to encourage our fishermen during a period of significant current and future change. I therefore recommend the scheme to the House.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): As Chairperson of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The Minister has brought us a scheme that the Committee has considered and endorsed. This is a confirmatory resolution, meaning that the scheme is already in operation. It came into operation on 2 September, but it shall cease to have effect if not approved by a resolution of the Assembly within three months of the date of its making, hence the Minister's bringing the motion today.

A little bit of background may be useful at this point. There was a plenary debate before the summer recess on the need for more support for the fishing industry. That industry has suffered as a result of extremely bad weather that meant that fishermen were unable to fish and incomes fell substantially.

Coupled with rising fuel prices and other economic circumstances, that left the industry in a fragile state. After that debate, the Minister sought and obtained approval from the Executive on 4 July for just over £500,000 of emergency financial assistance to the fishing industry.

3.45 pm

As we were in recess at that stage, Joe Byrne MLA, Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and I, as Chairperson, were briefed by a senior Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) official on 8 July on the funding and the proposed scheme. We were informed that the financial assistance would require secondary legislation and that the plan was to lay that legislation during summer recess. We were also informed that the legislation would enable DARD to pay a grant to the owners of vessels less than 27 metres in length who had fished for 25 days in the current calendar year. That should ensure that only active vessels receive the grant aid. The Deputy Chairperson and I indicated that we were broadly content with the information provided and did not see the need to recall the Committee to consider

the financial assistance package or, indeed, the secondary legislation, once it had been laid during summer recess.

The Committee was in recess, so an information note based on that meeting was provided to all its members. They were also given the option of asking for the Committee to meet to consider the matter if necessary, but no member took up that offer.

As the Minister outlined, the grant will be paid based on 70% of the berthing and landing dues paid to UK harbour authorities by the vessel owner in 2012. To pay out the financial assistance as quickly as possible, with minimum red tape, DARD opted to use the previous year's activity as the basis for payments.

By the time that the Committee reconvened after summer recess and considered the information, we were glad to see that vessel owners had already been contacted and invited to send in applications. The Committee was pleased to note that the first of those applications were being processed in August and September.

The Committee considered the scheme at its first meeting in the 2013-14 session, on 10 September, and noted that legislation had taken longer to draft than anticipated, owing to the need to ensure compliance with EU de minimis aid rules. Nevertheless, the Committee was content with the legislation and the proposed scheme.

On behalf of the Committee, I say that I am pleased that the Minister brought forward the scheme as a short-term option to assist the fishing industry, which has experienced very bad sailing and fishing conditions in the severe winter months. I note that further, longer-term assistance is to be offered. Indeed, I was very interested to hear late last week that the Minister had announced a fund worth £2.6 million that is aimed at supporting projects and initiatives that focus on the sustainable socio-economic development of County Down's fishing communities. I understand that the aim is to see a range of projects based around community development; business development and diversification; tourism and leisure; and technical development support. The Committee looks forward to hearing more on that initiative in the near future.

Mr Byrne: I rise as Deputy Chair of the Committee to welcome the statement and the motion in the name of the Minister. As the Chairman outlined, we had a debate before the summer recess in which great concern was expressed about the plight of the fishermen at the three ports of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel, given the bad weather that there was in March and April. I am delighted that the Minister and the Department brought forward a proposal, which was agreed by the Chairman and me with Mr Ian Humes, a senior official, on 8 July.

I welcome the fact that the processing of the scheme has been fairly fast, given the circumstances surrounding the whole fishing debacle that people found themselves in. I support the motion and welcome the statement by the Minister. Hopefully, the fishermen of south Down and Portavogie will be happy that on this occasion the Assembly responded to their plight.

Mr McCarthy: As a past pupil of the Agriculture Committee, I was not involved, but I listened attentively to what the Chair and Deputy Chair said. I certainly welcome the proposal by the Minister this afternoon. However, I want to ask just one question. I think that the Minister said

that there were 367 of something but only 155 applications. That is rather surprising. If I am wrong, perhaps the Minister can put me right in her response.

I welcome this. As other Members who spoke said, the fishing industry in Northern Ireland has been on its knees for far too long. I encourage the Minister to do what she can to help the industry — in fact, to save it — at every opportunity, because it has been on a downward spiral for too long. From her perspective as Minister, it is a matter of saving the industry. My constituents depend on the fishing industry for a living and I encourage her to use every opportunity to support it.

Mrs O'Neill: I welcome all the comments made by those who contributed to the debate. I can confirm for Mr McCarthy that there were 367 eligible boats, but that only 155 applications came forward. There could be various reasons for that; perhaps some were affected to a greater or lesser extent than others, but that is the reason for the figures.

Again, I want to say that the scheme sends a very strong message to the fishing industry that this Executive is committed to making sure that we have a very strong and sustainable fishing industry into the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Job Creation

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. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other contributors will have five minutes.

Mr Flanagan: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern at Invest NI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs created as a result of government intervention; notes the absence of any Invest NI-facilitated visits to some constituencies in recent years, by potential foreign direct investors; welcomes the Programme for Government 2011-15 commitment to address regional imbalance; and calls on the Executive to publish an action plan outlining how they intend to meet these commitments.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Committee for selecting this important motion for debate. The whingers, as we would be dubbed, are back again. I was going to say that, as usual, the Chamber is far from packed for a debate on the economy, but then I looked at my own Benches and thought that I had better not. I have said it now anyway.

Have the whingers anything to whinge about, or is it that there is some sense of an inferiority complex when you get outside Belfast? We have been provided with an extensive paper from the Assembly research team and I am glad to have it. The figures it contains clearly show that, since April 2009, there has not been a single Invest NI-led visit by a potential foreign investor to County Fermanagh or County Tyrone. That is simply not good enough; it is a shameful indictment of the Department and Invest NI and it needs to change.

There has been far too much emphasis spent, comparatively, on trying to get investment into already thriving and affluent areas such as east Belfast and south Belfast. A credible visit is defined as one where Invest NI claims to have promoted the North and arranged a visit programme to a district council area or parliamentary constituency area for a potential inward investor who has an identifiable project proposal. If we take a look at the credible visits that have been led by Invest NI, there were none last year in Fermanagh or Tyrone and four in Derry. That demonstrates the problem that we face here, which is that Invest NI is completely failing to get investors out of the typical areas in which you would expect to see them. That has been going on since Invest NI was founded and, really, since the foundation of this state.

Not enough is being done to create jobs and attract investment into struggling rural areas. *[Interruption.]* The Minister can tut and sigh and roll her eyes, as she always does, when somebody tables a motion that criticises her Department or any of her arm's-length bodies, but that is a fact. We have statistics here to back it up.

I am sure that the Minister will come up with figures showing that there is a higher unemployment rate in the rest of Ireland than the average figure in the North —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily give way, Sammy, go on ahead.

Mr Wilson: I am glad to see that the Member is keen to get jobs promoted in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Perhaps he will tell us what he thinks of the jobs that might be created if fracking were allowed to get cheap gas to drive industry in the area and get investment into the area, or is that the kind of investment that he does not like?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. Unfortunately, I will not get an extra minute, which I am sure he knew when he interrupted me. We will continue to debate fracking. Tamboran invariably overestimates the number of jobs that would be created. It is a very small number; you would be looking at 10 to 20 jobs a year over the period of the investment. Tamboran would tell you that it would have three people doing three shifts a day, monitoring the gauges at each pad. Nine people would be required at each pad each day to do nothing else but look at a gauge. Am I seriously expected to believe that a company like Tamboran would not simply put in a computer that could be monitored by one individual somewhere? That is eight jobs a day gone. Every time we are told that a certain number of jobs are coming, it is quite clear that there is nothing in it.

I will not allow the red herring of fracking to be thrown into the debate. I will return to what Invest NI is actually doing. Not nearly enough is being done to get investment into struggling rural areas, which are being hammered by the return of forced emigration. There is a similar picture in deprived areas such as Foyle and west Belfast, which are being completely neglected by the Department and Invest NI.

The Minister, some other Ministers and some MLAs are right to point out in the media that there are some green shoots of recovery. Those have been identified through a number of very accurate surveys, and that is welcome news. However, unfortunately, as a rural MLA who has spoken to businesses and those who live in my constituency, I know that those green shoots of recovery are not making it as far as rural areas, nor are they making it into deprived communities —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: — where unemployment and underemployment remain fair too high. I will, quickly, Paul.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I have heard what the Member said and I have read his motion. However, the same Member sat in a media studio with me not so long ago and heaped praise on Invest NI for the work that it has been doing. Why has he changed tack?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am more than happy to clarify that. Invest NI has had a number of successes in attracting foreign investors into the North. My complaint at this stage is that not enough is being done to get those investors into the areas of highest need. I remind the Member and the party opposite that the Programme for Government makes a very clear commitment to address regional imbalance. When I said that at a meeting of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I was appalled when a Member for

North Down said that such things do not exist. That is a commitment of the Programme for Government, which his party signed up to.

Invest NI is doing some positive work. I am not going to stand here and criticise it for 10 minutes. The last time that representatives of Invest NI made a presentation to the Committee, I and the Chair acknowledged and welcomed the fact that there is a widely held acceptance that Invest NI has improved its performance. It is much more accessible to the wider business community and it is no longer solely focused on client companies. The establishment of the Boosting Business campaign has made it an awful lot easier for small businesses and microbusinesses to access the services that are provided by Invest NI.

All those things are welcome, but much more can be done. We had the recent very successful investment conference, when 55 potential investors were brought here and sold what we have to offer. That is all very positive and great to see. However, we need to ensure that the commitments of the Programme for Government are delivered and that efforts are made to address regional imbalance. That is one of the key points of the Programme for Government.

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

There has been a long-standing issue with Invest NI reporting jobs promoted and jobs created. We have not got satisfactory closure on that yet. We kept being told that that is a work in progress and that it is being done through the jobs fund. However, in the financial interventions by Invest NI, we are still told that we are dealing with jobs promoted. That is not really good enough from the point of view of the scrutiny Committee or the Assembly in trying to hold the Executive to account. If we do not have the information, how can we assess what is being done?

I am sure that someone on the Benches opposite will tell us that Invest NI cannot force investors to go to a certain location. However, I would like to remind them that, under selective financial assistance, there is a greater incentive for businesses to set up outside Belfast because they can tap into a higher level of financial return from Invest NI. I really cannot understand why Invest NI is so keen to put people in east and south Belfast. That is where most of the investment goes.

4.00 pm

If you actually speak to some of the people on the ground in east Belfast, they will tell you that all of those projects that have been brought in are not being felt in the working-class communities there either. Therefore, this is not just a problem for rural communities; it is a problem for working-class and deprived communities right across our society, and it needs to be addressed.

I also want to make a point about the recent media speculation about the social investment fund. The report is out there that the DUP want it to be split 50:50. I am not involved in that at all, and it is not something that I am privy to. However, on the radio this morning, we heard a member of the east Belfast steering group say that there is £80 million. That is £40 million for each community — £10 million a year for each community. That is not the way that it should be divided. It should be done on the basis of objective need. That is the way that the social investment

fund should be used, and that is the way that the Executive should do their business. We should not simply seek to put jobs and investment into already affluent areas. Much more focus needs to go on tackling deprivation, social exclusion and isolation in rural and deprived communities.

Mr McKinney: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "publish" and insert:

"an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs."

At the outset, I apologise for not being in my place at the beginning of the debate. I appreciate that the timings are indicative.

The SDLP welcomes the general intentions and thrust of the motion. Our amendment seeks to expand and extend its scope and, in particular, to assert that, although it is important to hold officials and agencies such as Invest NI to account, our fundamental problem revolves around the lack of political action on the economy.

We welcome the motion for the simple reason that there is too little debate on the economic fundamentals — too little in the House, too little in our council chambers and, indeed, too little in our society as a whole. Turn on the radio any day of the week and you hear people complaining, with justification, that our political system spends too much time debating flags and parades and neglects the bread-and-butter issues in general and the provision of jobs in particular. John Hume often related the one political lesson his father taught him: you cannot eat a flag — any flag. That is a diet that our people have had to live on for far too long, and we are the people who should be providing new and better forms of sustenance.

In Parliaments around the world, different views of how to generate economic growth or how to reconcile growth with social values are the very stuff of politics, but not here. We think that it is time to change that. We think that it is time to put the economy at the forefront of our politics for the simple reason that our need is so great. It is so great because our economy is so weak and so dependent on government spending. You sometimes hear that our public sector is too big, but that is quite simply the wrong way to define the problem and no way to find a solution.

The real difficulty, and it is a very large one, is that our private wealth-producing sector is too small. Some economists point out that the private sector in Northern Ireland is smaller than it was in East Germany before the wall came down. We do not produce enough wealth to fund the public services we have, never mind the services that we need. Notice has been served on us that current funding levels cannot be taken for granted.

This is not just an economic problem, and it is certainly not just a problem of public finance and the block grant. It is a political problem, because, if we do not provide a better diet than flags, and if we do not show our people that we have some sort of plan to bring them more prosperity, the achievements of the peace process will be at risk, and all the photo opportunities in the world will not save it. The challenge that we face in trying to turn our economy around is so enormous, so difficult and so uncertain that many people prefer to stay with the other simple certainties. Even well-intentioned people who seek —

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. He seems to be obsessed with flags in his speech. Maybe he will tell us how many times flags were debated over the past three weeks in the Assembly and on how many occasions there were debates about one or another aspect of the economy. Let us put it in some perspective, please.

Mr McKinney: I do not confine the debate that I am referring to as being simply within the Chamber; I am talking about in this community. I am trying to suggest that we remove the flags from our narrative and focus on the economy. I think that that is something that you, Mr Wilson, as a former Finance Minister, would agree with.

Even well-intentioned people who seek to grapple with the enormity of the problem can get lost in very local arguments or sidetracked by less-essential details. Scrutiny of Invest NI is important, but there are more important things, such as having an agreed, integrated economic development plan. Even if we were to double or treble the number of investment visits west of the Bann, it would not provide the essential infrastructure that investors want to see before they commit. We should not confuse symptoms with the illness of poor regional development. Every country in Europe has its own version of the west-of-the-Bann problem. Every country knows that there is not much point in balanced underdevelopment. Regional imbalances are best addressed in a growing economy. That is the crux of our amendment.

In the spring and early summer, the SDLP undertook a round of consultations with the social partners, other economic stakeholders and professional economists. It confirmed what we suspected: that there is, in fact, a high degree of consensus about the way forward for the Northern Ireland economy, which runs right through the business community, the trade unions and the voluntary sector. Indeed, the economists told us that the consensus has existed for nearly half a century.

There was another thing they all agreed on, which was the urgent need for political action to drive the economy forward. So there is consensus out there, Mr Wilson. We need to match it with enough political consensus in here to develop our economy. We cannot wait until we have sorted all of the flag and parade disputes, and we do not need to. An economic consensus need not be hostage to constitutional differences.

The SDLP wants to see a new Ireland, but in the meantime we want growth and jobs, and plenty of them. So I put it to the proposers of the original motion: can you sign up to the proposition that we should make the best of our economy right now? Can you commit to the building up of Northern Ireland and its economy within its current constitutional arrangements? I put the same fundamental question to those on the Benches opposite: are you prepared to extract all of the economic value that can be won from North/South cooperation and to seek new forms of cooperation in the interests of providing jobs here and saving our young people from forced emigration? Are you prepared to adopt the ambition that Northern Ireland should, some day, be able to pay its own way?

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. He has talked about how important it is to do all that we can to create more jobs in Northern Ireland, and I absolutely agree with him. Would he therefore support calls to reform

employment law to make it easier for companies to take on additional staff?

Mr McKinney: I do not know the extent to which you are talking about the reform of that, but as long as people are being paid the industrial wage and above, we should be talking about the same thing.

I will go back to my point. That is all the political consensus that we really need to put the economy at the top and centre of our agenda. That is all that we would need for the Executive to convene a standing council of stakeholders in our economy who could reveal the existing broad policy consensus and guide us on its implementation.

During our consultations, we were quite surprised by the virtual absence of ideological bickering when it came to the development of the economy. Nobody is arguing that economic growth can be safely left to market forces on the one hand or that we need an even bigger public sector on the other. From all sides, we heard arguments for greater coherence, well-planned public policies, dialogue across sectors and much greater economic awareness among politicians and civil servants.

We believe that a good economic plan should start with an infrastructure plan. That would clearly challenge the powers and competencies of the devolved Administration. However, with a good plan for a prosperity process, it would be reasonable to approach the two Governments and ask them to incorporate it into their own long-term planning. So, improved road transport, power and communications infrastructure are all essential elements of a package that a prospective investor would want to see. I question whether that is the case, for example, in Fermanagh today. This morning's news about further delay in road infrastructure to Derry is also disheartening.

We need ambition. We need political action. We need a plan. I urge you to support the amendment.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome this debate and the opportunity to put on record our support for the good work that has been done in job creation.

Northern Ireland has come a long way in recent years, not least economically, despite the challenges that are presented by the global downturn and recession. We continue to work very hard to rebuild and rebalance the economy. I commend the work of the Executive for leading on that issue, not least the First and deputy First Minister, along with the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Arlene Foster, who have been selling, and continue to sell, Northern Ireland to the world as a great place to do business and invest in.

The fact that, as we speak, the First Minister and deputy First Minister are in America trying to attract investment shows the commitment to and focus on trying to bring jobs and economic stability to this country — quite rightly. Invest NI continues to promote Northern Ireland as a great place to do business and invest in as well as working to support our existing small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the backbone of the economy throughout the country.

The task of attracting jobs and developing our economy is not easy, not least because we are still trying to emerge from 30 years of terrorism. However, despite the difficult circumstances and global challenges, we have many assets and skills, and we should all do what we can to

encourage, support and attract economic growth and stability.

It is noteworthy that Sinn Féin reps and others complain about the lack of job creation in the west and north-west. One wonders what they have done to encourage and attract investors instead of complaining and sending out negative messages about their areas. The north-west area and the city of Londonderry, in particular, have seen an unprecedented level of funding through the UK City of Culture. We understand that upwards of £26 million or £28 million has been spent. Some say that it is £26 million on a ceilidh; that is some ceilidh.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He mentioned Londonderry being the UK City of Culture. Does he agree that, had it not been for the good work and expertise of the Culture Company's chief executive, Shona McCarthy, we might not be as far forward?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dunne: Indeed we concur with that. They have done a good job in getting the UK City of Culture. That has no doubt given them an excellent platform on which they should be able to build. I am sure that, with the support of their elected representatives, they will start to promote the city as a positive place where business can be done.

The recently launched Fermanagh and Omagh Smart region project is an example of an innovative project that has been developed to explore economic opportunities in those areas. Another example is the recent investment of £11.5 million in a clinical research facility in Londonderry — well outside Belfast — that will create 22 high-quality research posts. That came about as a result of £5.6 million support from Invest NI, part-funded by the European regional development fund. Many other recently announced projects have been brought about with the help of that European fund. Northern Ireland's 100% assisted area status will remain, which means that the country will avoid being divided up into subregions for that funding support.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way and for his support on a number of projects. Does he accept that joined-up thinking and research between Invest NI, the Department, the European Commission and the SME sector is needed across the whole of the North? You will be aware from our trip to Brussels of the attempts to facilitate that.

Mr Dunne: I concur with that. Joined-up thinking is important. As was said, Invest NI has taken the lead and has gone onto the byways to sell its products. We all believe in communicating better, especially with elected representatives, to get the message out there.

Many other recently announced projects have been brought about with help from the European fund. Northern Ireland's 100% assisted area status will remain, and it will continue to get such support.

Evidence from Invest Northern Ireland's annual report for the year ending March 2013 shows that investment and job promises in 2012-13 exceeded the targets, and investment by externally owned businesses, including foreign direct investment, signed up for £183 million linked to 2,203 jobs. Invest NI trade missions have also brought about real benefits. I know of many companies in my constituency that have come back with orders and direct work and been

given windows of opportunity for the future after being on such trade missions around the world.

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

Mr Dunne: Yes. Northern Ireland has a lot going for it, and the recent investment conference, along with the G8 held in Fermanagh, showcased this country as a great place to do business.

4.15 pm

Mrs Overend: The economy is, rightly, set out as the number one priority of the Executive in the current Programme for Government. I thank the Sinn Féin Members for tabling the motion today as it is right and important to talk about job creation. The central component of that priority is job creation with a commitment to support the promotion of 25,000 jobs by 2015. So, the motion highlights an important issue, namely the fact that we have next to no clarity on the number of jobs created as opposed to those promoted and so we cannot judge our success against the Programme for Government. My party has a similar motion tabled on the no-day-named list. It is entitled:

"Ambiguity over Job Creation Targets and Performance"

That sums up the situation that we are in.

The Audit Office produced a report in March 2012 entitled 'Invest NI: a performance review', and one of the major issues raised in it was that, whilst Invest Northern Ireland's job promotion record has improved, the number of jobs created is unclear. The report points out that the estimated proportion of promoted jobs that translated into jobs created stands at around 75%. However, that is Invest Northern Ireland's own estimate. The reality is that the conversion rate may be as low as 50%. If we were to look at a practical example, we would see that the Programme for Government target that I mentioned would result in the actual creation of only 12,500 jobs. That is not acceptable, and we need the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI to have more accountable measurements in place. The alternative is the absence of proper scrutiny and an erosion of public confidence. However, in saying that, I note the progress made in the jobs fund, where jobs created have been measured, as a step in the right direction.

The Public Accounts Committee took evidence in February 2013 from officials representing Invest Northern Ireland and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I welcome the clarification that that evidence brought to the matter. Alastair Hamilton explained in detail where we are today in relation to where we were in 2000 when the Westminster PAC first suggested a move towards measuring jobs created. I am sure that he will agree with me that, in 13 years, we have not moved far enough. Nevertheless, I welcome his attempts to rectify that, not least through Invest Northern Ireland's corporate plan. It is also the case that new systems are in place whereby, from 1 April 2012, letters of offer can be tracked to give a more accurate jobs picture. That is a positive development. The PAC subsequently produced a report including a recommendation that, now that Invest Northern Ireland has developed systems for measuring outcomes, it should

establish formal targets for job creation, sustainability, job quality and funds invested. It also said that performance should be reported annually from 2014-15 on the basis of actual outcome. I ask the Minister, in her response, to outline how she is implementing that recommendation put forward by our Public Accounts Committee.

The motion also specifically mentions issues such as regional imbalance and the absence of Invest Northern Ireland in certain areas. I have raised that in the context of the Regional Start initiative in light of the proposed new council model. I have also facilitated Invest Northern Ireland meetings on Coleraine and Limavady, which appear to suffer from a lack of focus from our central agency in supporting business and attracting FDI. I have also met business development representatives in Omagh who feel that the potential of Project Kelvin is not being adequately promoted in Northern Ireland's sales pitch. We must guard against becoming too Belfast- or Londonderry-centric, and we must promote Northern Ireland as a region that is all open for business, not just certain parts of it. We must recognise —

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. She has sat through the Committee meetings and is probably sick, sore and tired of me rabbiting on about this stuff, but does she accept that it is crucial that we have the infrastructure in place? The infrastructure is not just roads and sewerage services but power, such as electricity. I know that that has been raised with you. Likewise, it includes accommodation: suitably tailored accommodation for firms that are potentially about to invest and need accommodation quickly to do so. Otherwise, they will be away somewhere else.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for his intervention. I was just coming to the SDLP amendment; I was not going to forget about it. The Ulster Unionists are minded to lend our support to the SDLP amendment and agree that it is logical that any action plan that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment develops will also take into account the issues that the Member mentioned: development space, infrastructure needs etc.

We must recognise the lack of openness and transparency surrounding job creation targets and performance, which has been particularly unhelpful in the current economic climate. I welcome the fact that the Minister is here to respond to the debate, and I look forward to her response.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. The amendment expands the motion slightly, so we are happy enough to support that also.

At the outset, I place it on record, not for the first time, that Invest NI has been and continues to be a success story, despite complaints from time to time about its performance, its failure to spend all its money at a time of world recession and the occasional failure it has. Its long-term record is impressive.

It is hard to comprehensively judge Invest's performance on the present available data. The first part of the motion expresses concern about the actual number of jobs created as opposed to jobs promoted, and that is a theme that I have taken up with the Minister. I quote the Minister's answer to a question on 26 April this year:

"Invest NI is developing its systems to enable the reporting of jobs created. Data will therefore be available this year but as offers typically have a three year life span, a detailed and meaningful analysis of this job creation data will not be possible until the end of each contract period ... The exception to this are those projects supported through the 'Jobs Fund' "

It will obviously be some time before accurate figures filter through, but I am satisfied that the matter is being dealt with. Doing that was recommended some 13 years ago in a review report on the IDB.

The second part of the motion deals with regional imbalance, which is of particular concern to Mr Flanagan, who proposed the motion. The amendment develops that point when it talks about "available office and development space" and infrastructure. There has to be realism. Most investment visits will focus on key sites, such as city centres and zoned industrial sites, the Titanic Quarter and hopefully, if God spares us all, eventually the Maze. The ultimate decision rests with the investor, and, while the Programme for Government commitment to address imbalance is welcome, the investor will look at all the pluses and minuses, not least infrastructure and linkages.

On a slight tangent, Mr Deputy Speaker, I put a question to the Minister about air routes in September 2012, and she gave a full and informative answer that concentrated on tourism potential rather than business connections. I strongly advocate reducing the need for businessmen or businesswomen from the powerhouse economies of Europe — Germany, France and Scandinavia — to fly into Dublin to access Northern Ireland. I encourage the Minister to continue her efforts to establish direct links to major cities in all those regions, including Brussels.

Having said that, I see nothing wrong with the motion or the amendment. We are content to support them, and I look forward to the Minister's comments.

Mr Frew: I rise in bewilderment at what the party that tabled the motion and the party that seeks to amend it are saying. We in Northern Ireland are doing well. We are starting to recover from the worst recession in living memory, and we are doing fine. We are creating jobs. In only the past month, we have had announcement after announcement of new jobs in places from Omagh to Limavady, Londonderry and Belfast and everywhere and anywhere in between. Yet, here we are debating a motion that tries to put a damper on everything that we are trying to achieve in this place.

It really amazes me how MLAs who represent certain areas, whether that is Fermanagh, Londonderry, mid-Ulster or anywhere else for that matter, can play down and talk downbeat about their areas when we are trying hard to bring inward investment to those areas. The last thing that a company that could employ 1,000 people wants to hear is MLAs being downbeat. The Member who moved the motion told us only last year in this very House that, whenever he wanted to go on holiday, he could not spend two weeks in his own constituency of Fermanagh. What sort of language is that that this Chamber —

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: — hears from time to time about —

Mr Flanagan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to put it on the record for Mr Frew that I did not say that I could not spend a fortnight in my constituency, given that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That clearly is not a point of order.

Mr Flanagan: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is not the same point of order.

Mr Flanagan: No. I want to ask the Deputy Speaker what an MLA can do to correct the record if a false allegation is made about what one has previously said in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Discussions can be had with the Speaker's Office. Apart from that, this is a debate, and the Member may well have an opportunity to respond later.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am glad that you stopped the clock for me; I really appreciate that.

I am sorry that the Member is so sore. Of course, if he wants to apologise to his constituency, that is well and good — he can do it here and now. I will give way to him on that.

I must also say that the Member who moved the amendment was obsessed by flags; Mr Wilson was right. Whenever we talk day in and day out in the House about the economy being the number one priority —

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept the assessment by business organisations in Belfast that the flags dispute last year cost something in the order of £50 million?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Again, why are we so obsessed with this when we are here trying to play up Northern Ireland, its economy, its workforce and the provision of work that we can produce that will help foreign direct investors to come here to plant down on our land and to create jobs for Northern Ireland? I do not know what is wrong, but I will say one thing to the Member —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: I will not give way at the minute, but I will say to the Member that I welcome the SDLP's shift today from its position on easing employment laws in line with the rest of the UK. That could create a competitive edge for Northern Ireland in bringing these companies into the UK. We want a slice of that market, and I am glad that the SDLP is now shifting tack on that issue. I welcome that announcement here today.

The Member also talked about infrastructure. Was he not listening when the Finance Minister made his announcement on money and said that £8.1 million will go to help dual an 8-kilometre section of the A26 at Glarryford? Was he not listening? Has he not been studying the work that we have done over the past couple of months on rural broadband and how we have been able to get broadband provision into our rural areas? Has he not been listening and studying? I know that the Member is

new, but I thought that he would be sure to keep a grasp of the agenda and the business that is going through here.

I am sorry, but some of the Members on the Benches across from me are so small-minded that they want to start talking about a job created here in this county or there in that constituency. When you look at foreign direct investment around the world, you will see that they will think nothing of planting down in Northern Ireland and creating jobs for the whole of Northern Ireland. Some of the largest employers are in North Antrim, where 1,000 jobs have been retained, and those jobs come from far and near. They benefit not just Ballymena, Ballymoney and Ballycastle but places all over Northern Ireland. They create direct employment in Tyrone, Londonderry, Down and everywhere else. They also add a dimension of indirect employment, whereby they support other businesses and subcontractors. That is what we want to see more of in Northern Ireland. I ask Members across the Chamber this: as long as you play down your own areas, how do you expect to go to those direct employers, let alone have the Minister do so, and —

4.30 pm

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: No. I am not giving way. I gave you your chance, and you blew it.

How do you expect to go and plead with companies to come into your constituency when they read the papers and read Hansard and see that you run the place down? That is the problem that we face in Northern Ireland.

There are too many negative MLAs playing down their own area. I for one want to talk about the good things in my constituency of North Antrim. I want to talk about job retention, the skills base and how we can create even more jobs for North Antrim and all of Northern Ireland.

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

Mr Frew: That is what the Minister is doing, that is what she should be doing, and I am glad that she is doing it.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: The Member who has just spoken was bewildered before he started; I am more bewildered having listened to him. None of his commentary was about the economy; rather, it was an attack across the Benches. I, for one, have no qualms about promoting my city or the north-west region or, indeed, the island of Ireland as a whole. However, I will continue to challenge and criticise where gaps occur, and I take issue with the Member across the Benches who referred to £28 million being provided to our city for a ceilidh. I am sure that the 51% of people who live in high social need in our city would equally take issue with that comment. As the proposer of the amendment said, we should of course all concentrate on keeping the economy centre-stage. That is the very reason that the economy is central to the Programme for Government. However, where there are gaps and regional disparities, in line with the commitments in the Programme for Government, they need to be addressed.

Let me deal with some of the facts, as perhaps some have escaped Members on the opposite Benches. It is not good enough for the Audit Office simply to tell us that the impact of INI's R&D programmes on productivity has not yet been quantified. Some 60% of the investment support offered

by INI from 2011 to 2012 went to eight constituencies across the North. Those eight constituencies are located in and around the greater Belfast area. That is a fact. The remaining 40% of support was shared with the rest of the North, including Derry, which received 5%. Again, we have looked at the number of jobs promoted, although we take issue and want to see new jobs created. Some 56% of the jobs promoted by INI, across all the sectors, went to the same eight constituencies. The remaining 44% of jobs were shared among the rest of the North, including Derry, which received only 6%.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was asked in June 2011 to provide a breakdown by constituency of the 13,870 jobs promoted and the £784 million investment by INI. The answer told us that 47% of the jobs promoted by INI from 2011-12 to 2012-13 went to eight constituencies. Again, the pattern is stark. Of the remaining 53% of jobs promoted, Derry received 6%. I do not need to go on, but we had a similar pattern when we looked at the numbers of jobs created and promoted. Therefore, overall —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. It may have been before her time of course, but does she realise that between 2003 and 2012, on a per capita basis, more jobs were created in Londonderry through foreign direct investment projects than in any other city in the UK?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Thank you for your intervention. The research papers that Members have been provided with today reveal that four FDI visits were conducted in that period to Derry, but there was no follow-up.

Overall, there is a trend in job promotion and creation across the North. I have detailed the outline of the eight constituencies. Two per cent of logged enquiries to the Boosting Business campaign were from Derry. There have been 18,724 enquiries. INI told us that there was a total of 41 inward investments to Derry over five years. There were, as the Member tried to challenge, four first-time prospective international investors in 2012-13, but there was no follow-up.

I want to specifically make reference to office development space. INI land-holding titles in the Derry area come to 414 acres. A remaining 203 acres are available for economic development. Therefore, my suggestion is that processes should be targeted. I want to deal with the important issue of supporting and promoting your city. I accept that every —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way again. We are down to not only constituencies but acres. Any foreign direct investor is coming here to look at Northern Ireland as a Province-wide entity. They are not looking at constituencies, and they are definitely not looking at acres. Does the Member agree that we have to promote Northern Ireland in its totality in order to get the jobs and investment here?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for his intervention. He should have listened to the Centre for Economic Policy, which was before the Committee last week and clearly talked about the need, as the proposer of the amendment mentioned, to deal with office accommodation and office space, particularly for economic development. I am making the point that 203 acres are available and need to be targeted in the overall context of the debate.

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: The Member can smile and be smug if he wants.

It is about promoting the city. Derry and the north-west region has clearly stepped up to the mark in relation to a unique selling point. We need the Minister and INI to fall in behind the recommendations that say —

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: — that we need to tackle regional disparities.

Mr Wilson: I am grossly disappointed by the debate. I expected the proposer of the motion to have at least some substance to his complaint against the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. No Minister has been more successful in promoting industry in Northern Ireland than Arlene Foster, who has trailed the world and brought jobs here by the thousand. We have only to look at the record since May: over 3,500 jobs have been promoted and announced in Northern Ireland in that short period from across the world. Incidentally, those jobs went across Northern Ireland; one third of them went to the west of Northern Ireland.

Normally, the Member who proposed the motion can have a good whinge. He did not even have a good whinge this time. He ran out of steam after eight minutes and had to move on to the social investment fund, so few points had he to make in complaint about how Invest NI and the Minister have promoted the west of the Province.

I will make a couple of points to deal with the issues he raised. The first is a point that has already been made: you do not make a case for your constituency by running it down and saying that you have the worst unemployment, the worst infrastructure, the worst skills and the worst long-term unemployment. That is the kind of thing that puts investors off. Secondly, the harsh reality of the market is that people do not say, "I fancy investing in Derrygonnelly. What is Derrygonnelly like? What is Belcoo like? What is Kesh like?". There is parochialism; it is almost as if people coming in from all around the world want to look at each individual village. It is hard enough to get them to look at Northern Ireland, let alone to start looking at all the favourite spots that Members wish to see promoted.

The third point on the issues that he raised is that the promotion of jobs and the announcements that have been made do not bear out the complaint that he has made. A total of 1,139 of the 3,500 jobs that have been announced since May are in the west of the Province. What is the nature of his complaint and what does he want the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to do? We have had the G8 conference in Fermanagh, and we will have an investment conference. Jobs have been announced in many of the towns in his constituency.

The people who actually sell Fermanagh are not Sinn Féin representatives but the people whose companies I have visited. They are proud of their workforce and the work that they do. For example, Fisher Engineering, which lost 70% of its work in the Republic, went out to search for work and secured the likes of the Titanic signature project and the Shard, against all competition. Those are the kinds of people we ought to be saluting today, rather than hearing the kind of whingeing that we have had here.

I turn to the amendment, from which Mr McKinney is now trying to retreat. What he said will, of course, get him a good headline. He fed media perceptions when he said that the Assembly spends too much time talking about flags. I cannot remember when we did that in the past three weeks, but it will give him a good headline. What answers does he bring? First, he wants us to have a standing council of stakeholders. I do not know what that means. There is already an economic advisory group and a whole range of people have fed into the economic policy of the Assembly, but he wants yet another body. That will sort the problem out, apparently.

Secondly, he wants a grand plan. We have had plans in the past. Stalin had his —

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

Mr Wilson: — five-year plan, and maybe that is the Stalinist wing of the SDLP coming out. I would prefer us to get down to doing hard work; not setting up more committees or drawing up more bits of paper. Let us search out the investors and sell the values of Northern Ireland, as Arlene Foster has done.

Mr P Ramsey: I support the motion and our added elements through the amendment. I am glad to contribute to the debate, although, at times, I fail to understand some of the comments of the Members on the other Benches. Sammy cheerfully told us that all we are doing is whingeing. I want to reflect directly to the Minister the views of the long-term unemployed and young people in my constituency, who feel somewhat disillusioned at present.

The issues reflected in the motion are regularly raised with me by my constituents, who comment on the failure not only of Invest Northern Ireland but of DETI and the Executive collectively to deliver in my constituency. I have long championed the need for a spatial investment strategy from Invest Northern Ireland to target and address important issues affecting the north-west.

Time after time, the Minister has informed me that the agency is not able to produce subregional plans or targets because of the recommendations of the independent review of economic policy. That just does not wash with the long-term unemployed and young people in my city. Time after time, whether they like it or not, favouritism is shown at every opportunity for the capital city, Belfast, in getting jobs, forgetting the importance of the second city and the role that the north-west region plays.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Ramsey: Yes.

Mr McKinney: Does the Member accept that, if an £8.5 million spend on the A26 is good for the economy, a commensurate spend on the A5 and A6 would also be beneficial?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is obvious that, when we talk about regional disparity, we are talking about the infrastructural needs. The infrastructure in Belfast is a big winner for investors coming into Northern Ireland. The lack of roads infrastructure to the north-west is an obstacle, and I think that people should listen to what

is being said by the business community in the city that I represent.

Look at the Department's view of economies of conglomerations, where sectoral clusters are sited close together for the purposes of investment. We are told that Invest Northern Ireland highlights those clusters. I ask the Minister directly again: will she please tell me why Derry is not marketed as a cultural and technology hub for the future, given the amount of creative interest we have around the system?

4.45 pm

I have another question about the process used by Invest Northern Ireland to attract foreign direct investment to the North. I was told that all factors are utilised, but I ask the Minister: why is there no provision for Invest Northern Ireland to, for example, highlight and promote Derry city as the City of Culture and the north-west as the gateway to Donegal? Why has that not been invested in, when businesses, particularly inward investors, are looking for quality of life? That is the added bonus for many companies that have come to Derry with inward investment jobs; they see that quality of life in Donegal.

Derry city is doing very well. I have never seen such an immense sense of pride in the city. People feel that it is appropriate to stand here and say that there has been almost £30 million invested in the céilí. That money was invested because Derry represented Northern Ireland to become the City of Culture. Derry is representing Northern Ireland; it is not representing any community, whether it is the Bogside or the Waterside. I have to say, for all of the talk of shared future and reconciliation, it has never been going so well in terms of looking forward, setting the trends in the city and bringing both communities together in the most natural way, which has never happened before.

We have taken the lead in the most positive and constructive way in resolving the parades issue in the city. The last difficulty we had in the city was in 1999. Since then, we have been able to resolve it as a model of good practice. So I do not want people jibing away that we are not positive. I think that, in many regards — I have always said it in terms of the parliamentarians in the city — we have a unity of purpose, because we stand together to try to make a difference to the quality of life of the young people who we represent.

I am standing up today for the many unemployed and young people in my community. The Minister conceded — the figures are there — that the level of unemployment in Northern Ireland at the present time is under 7%, but, unfortunately, in Derry and the north-west it is 9%. Somebody tell me about those same young people, having the appetite for jobs and wanting to have a better future for themselves, who stood in their thousands at a jobs fair in the Millennium Forum seven or eight weeks ago. I say that we need bespoke programmes in the city. We need more creativity to give a better future to those same young people. Do not let anybody tell me that there should not be direct investment forced onto the north-west because of the high levels of unemployment, because I think that is what is needed in that community.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I now call Sydney Anderson. As time for the debate is running out, the Member will have three minutes.

Mr Anderson: I rise as a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee to speak briefly against the motion.

I am opposed to the motion because it is churlish, petty and negative. It is simply yet another effort to belittle the sterling efforts of Invest NI. The motion and the amendment are also further illustrations of the kindergarten level of economic thinking that seems to permeate both Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

Of course, it is no secret that Members opposite have always been critical of Invest NI as an organisation. I often think that, no matter how many jobs Invest attracts or what successes it might have in boosting our economy and creating jobs, there are those in the House who would still be carping and complaining about it. I am not saying that Invest NI is perfect or that it always gets things right, and I do not envy the Minister, her officials or the people in Invest, for they have a very challenging task.

Our economy has been battered as a result of the dramatic downturn in the world economy in the past few years. Credit must go to the Minister and Invest for all of their efforts during the past five challenging years to promote Northern Ireland on the world stage, attract foreign direct investment, and encourage and assist the local business sector. The Programme for Government target for 2011-15 is the creation of 25,000 new jobs.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr Anderson: No. As of 31 March, almost 14,000 jobs have been secured. I think we can safely say that those high-value-added jobs would not have happened under direct rule. Given the economic climate, and faced with increasingly strong competition on the world stage, our priority is to promote Northern Ireland plc. Northern Ireland is a small place. People who live and work in Great Britain are often bemused or amused when we complain of having to travel more than 20 miles to work. Even the furthest extremities of Northern Ireland are not that far from the greater Belfast area, where, not surprisingly, most of the jobs are.

In answer to my question to the Minister last month in relation to attracting new business across Northern Ireland, the Minister gave me several examples of businesses investing, expanding and winning new orders right across the Province. So, we are on the right track. I have no doubt that the Minister and Invest NI will continue to use selective financial assistance and regional aid to encourage the spread of business and employment opportunities across Northern Ireland, and particularly to areas of high unemployment. Instead of sulking in the shadows, surely Sinn Féin and the SDLP, as members of the Executive, should grow up and support the efforts being made to revitalise our local economy. I oppose the motion and the amendment.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): First of all, to raise the level of the debate, I thought that I would give you a quote this afternoon. Eleanor Roosevelt used to say:

"It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

We have had a lot of darkness here today, but I want to say to the Members opposite that I will keep turning on the light, even though you continue to curse the darkness.

I want to clarify the matter of reporting of jobs created as a result of Invest NI activity. The motion as proposed states that there has been a continuing failure by Invest NI to provide such information. That statement is somewhat misleading and would imply that Invest NI has or is currently deliberately withholding information. It is not withholding information. I am happy to give way to the Member if he wants to get up.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not know how the Minister can read:

"That this Assembly expresses concern at Invest NI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs"

as somebody saying that Invest NI is hiding them. This is how far we have to go now to get appalled and outraged and offended at something.

Mrs Foster: I think that you are appalled and outraged. I am not appalled and outraged. I have come to expect that level from the Member. Let me state quite categorically that Invest Northern Ireland has not been deliberately withholding information or secretly squirrelling it away. In fact, since the introduction of the jobs fund in 2011, Invest NI has had a specific target of creating 4,000 jobs by the end of the current financial year because it was a new jobs fund, and it has reported its progress against that goal openly as part of its annual performance reporting process.

It is also important to highlight the fact that the targets set for Invest Northern Ireland by the Programme for Government are, again, for job promotion. The Programme for Government sets out job promotion targets; it does not set out job creation targets. If the Member wants to take that up with his colleagues in the Executive, that is a matter for him. Again, it openly reports on its progress against those targets as part of its annual performance process, including to the Committee of which he is a member.

The issue of Invest NI providing information on the jobs created as a result of its wider interventions has been raised in the past and, as has often been explained, wider accurate reporting of job creation has not been possible before now because the appropriate systems were not available to allow for the relevant information to be comprehensively captured and collated. However, as I mentioned to the House a few weeks ago — and sometimes I wonder if Members actually listen to what I say in this House when I am asked the questions. It is almost as if they have to keep asking the questions even though I give the same answer every time in direct response to requests for details on jobs created. It has now developed new systems which will allow it to produce more extensive job creation information. However, it should be appreciated that developing such systems and migrating information into them takes time. Perhaps he would rather that I spend time on doing that rather than going out and looking for jobs.

However, I am pleased to say that it is expected that the information on job creation will be available from the start of the next financial year, but I do not want to give Members false expectations on what information can and will be provided. Whilst Invest will be able to report on the number of jobs created, it will not be possible to set widespread targets for job creation across its

range of intervention because the majority of Invest NI's employment-related support is focused on projects that can take a number of years to fully implement. In such cases, the imposition of job creation targets would be counterproductive — that is counterproductive. That means that it would go against job creation, just to be clear, in case people do not understand what that means.

That is because it would require annualised targets to be incorporated in individual letters of offer to companies. If those were not met, companies would be in breach of their offer conditions and liable for clawback of assistance. Such an approach would be unfair on businesses, because they operate in an ever-changing economic environment. During the recession, we frequently had to communicate with companies to see whether their letter of offer was such that they could take it up or whether they needed us to change the conditions. We recognised that people had difficulties at those times.

We are in an ever-changing economic environment, which makes it difficult to predict exactly when jobs will be delivered on the ground.

Mr Byrne: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Foster: Can you wait a second?

Therefore, the imposition of job creation targets would be seen as a barrier to investment and make Northern Ireland less attractive to potential foreign investors.

Mr Byrne: I want to recognise the contribution that Invest NI has made to my area of Omagh in recent times, with 40 jobs for Telestack and 260 jobs for Terex Powerscreen. Does the Minister accept, however, that there has to be a separation of function and operation between locally led development projects and foreign direct investment projects? There is some confusion, and our amendment may offer help.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for mentioning those two jobs announcements, which are significant: one from an absolutely tremendous locally owned and managed firm in Telestack and another from an international firm in Terex. There is a good mix of our indigenous companies and a foreign direct investor investing in the west of the Province. I was delighted to be able to make those jobs announcements.

I welcome the opportunity to clarify the position regarding Invest NI's role in inward visits, which is, namely, to promote all of Northern Ireland as a region that is capable of providing solutions to the business needs of new investors in its key target sectors. It is performing very well against that task in a highly competitive global market.

Members should remember that, in Northern Ireland, we are competing for mobile investment against much bigger countries and, indeed, regions within countries that are bigger than us. To be able to compete against those areas, we must sell Northern Ireland as a whole.

It is also important to note that Invest NI does not determine location. Mr Flanagan does not think that that point is worth very much, but it is true. We do not force people to go to particular areas in Northern Ireland. They tell us where they want to go, and we facilitate that. We do that because people make bids. They sell themselves and are positive. That is one reason why I have got very involved in the Smart region concept in Fermanagh and

Omagh. If I am challenging other areas and asking people what they are doing to bring foreign direct investment to their region, I have to step up to the plate as well. That is what I have done with the Smart region in Fermanagh and Omagh, the new review of public administration area in the south-west.

That Smart region gives us a proposition to take out and sell. I am so excited about the prospects for Fermanagh and Omagh with the Smart region. Invest NI has put in place a data analyst to help us to look at all the data in the region, to be clever about what we are doing in looking for foreign direct investment and, more importantly, to help our indigenous companies to look to the future, particularly to export markets. I put a challenge back: what are they doing for their regions and areas? I am quite satisfied that what I am doing with the Smart region for my area is new and innovative and will deliver for Fermanagh and Omagh.

I am the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the whole of Northern Ireland. Any inward investment must, therefore, showcase Northern Ireland's capability to meet a company's specific needs.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for giving way. Does she agree that the debate has been quite negative? We should be thinking about things that are pure and deemed worthy, such as the Giro d'Italia, which will come here next May, bringing not only tourism possibilities but job opportunities for businesses across Northern Ireland.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for mentioning tourism, because tourism is very important to a lot of areas across Northern Ireland. The Giro d'Italia will again lift our tourism offering to the wider world. We look forward to it very much.

Investors, when they consider anywhere, look at a number of key factors, including the availability of appropriately skilled labour. In answer to Mr Ramsey's point, which he made to me at Question Time and to the Minister for Employment and Learning, with whom I had a conversation last Thursday about economically inactive young people, I say that that strategy is coming out soon. I know that the Minister for Employment and Learning has spoken to you about some of that strategy and where we can move forward in it. We look forward to that, because that will be a mechanism for dealing with some of the genuine concerns that the Member has. I recognise that. We will want to deal with that.

5.00 pm

Investors will also look at suitable vacant land or property, which goes back to Ms McLaughlin's point; appropriate infrastructure to meet business needs; and existing clusters of companies in the business sector. So, Invest is continuing to capitalise on the opportunities to showcase Northern Ireland as a great place to invest and to do business in. The G8 summit gave us a great platform. Even the weather came out in Fermanagh, as I knew it would, to give us those pictures and to raise the profile of Northern Ireland as a whole.

The recent investment conference, of course, was a great success, and we look forward to some announcements coming out of that conference in the near future. I think that Members will be very pleased with those announcements, and, when they are made, I hope that some people will reflect on what they have said in the Chamber this

afternoon about what people have been doing in relation to their areas.

Invest NI is pursuing a number of opportunities to bring investment to the constituency of Foyle. The agency will actively engage with local stakeholders. Mr Ramsey raised a point about Digital Derry. We are absolutely engaged in that process to maximise the local proposition and to sell the area as a great place in which to invest. I believe that that is a very strong legacy from the UK City of Culture. We have been engaging with Digital Derry — that is its title; I say that before any of my colleagues get excited. We have been engaging with that organisation, because we see it as an organisation that has a futuristic approach for the economy in the region.

We are planning for Invest NI's 2014 international staff conference. Mr Flanagan will be pleased to hear that it is coming to Fermanagh. Although I note from the 'Fermanagh Herald' that he has said that they are not going to come out of their hotel when they come to Fermanagh. I will make sure that they come out of their hotel, Mr Flanagan. That is the sort of negative attitude I expect from Mr Flanagan. I bring the Invest NI staff conference to Fermanagh; international staff are coming to Fermanagh. What does he say to the 'Fermanagh Herald'? He says that they are going to stay in the hotel the whole time they are there. That is absolutely disgraceful from Mr Flanagan. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs Foster: It is the kind of opportunistic stuff that I expect from him.

With regard to where new investors choose to locate, we need to be realistic and understand that such decisions are taken by the investors, based on their respective business needs. However, overall, the Northern Ireland inward investment proposition remains strong, and we are well positioned to take advantage of any upturn in investor confidence.

I turn now to the final part of the motion. Whilst there are no specific commitments in the Programme for Government (PFG) that seek to specifically address regional imbalance, as a general principle, it is implied that all Programme for Government commitments should be implemented as equitably as possible for all citizens in Northern Ireland. As a Carson unionist, I say that that is exactly what we should be doing. Maybe the Sinn Féin Members across the way should have a look in Lord Carson's biography at what he said about true unionism. It is about delivering for the whole of the UK.

In translating that to Invest NI activity, there are important considerations to be made. As I have already made clear, seeking to force companies to recruit from, or locate in, specific areas could be highly detrimental to our ability to attract investors. By undermining our sales proposition — in effect, putting my arm behind my back when I am out trying to sell Northern Ireland — it would have a negative impact on our ability to create employment for the benefit of all in Northern Ireland.

Mr Frew: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I will.

Mr Frew: Does the Minister agree that MLAs across the Chamber talk, as they have done today, as if it would burn

their tongue to say "Northern Ireland" or as if it would burn their tongue to say "UK City of Culture", and it would burn their tongue to say that Belfast is our capital city? It burns their tongue, Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Frew: That sends out a confusion, which hurts investment in our country, as did the fact that they supported people who bombed our infrastructure for over 30 or 40 years.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his point. I noticed that, when Mr Flanagan talked about Invest NI, he talked about it promoting the North. We do not promote the North; we promote Northern Ireland right across the world, and that is very clear. We do not promote the North, and I want to put that on the record this afternoon.

Selective financial assistance has been mentioned on a number of occasions. I wanted to make the point that almost one quarter of new selective financial assistance jobs promoted were located in 10% of the most deprived neighbourhoods. That is a fact. This debate has had a scarcity of facts, but I think that it is about time that we got back to the facts.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister draw her remarks to a close, please?

Mrs Foster: It is not just about foreign direct investment. I could go on to talk about the local economic development measures that we have put in place through European funding and everything else, but I do wish that people would talk up Northern Ireland and its success.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis na Comhaltaí uilig agus ar ndóigh le moltóirí an rúin seo. I thank all those who contributed in one way or another to today's proceedings and those who tabled the motion.

A variety of issues came up. The proposer of the motion talked about PFG commitments, regional imbalances, jobs promoted and jobs created, which was a common theme throughout the debate, and the location of jobs created by Invest NI.

Mr McKinney, in proposing our party's amendment, was criticised for raising the flags issue. It is a fact that, as a region, we cannot afford to have those messages flagged across the world again, whether it is regarding tourism or inward investment. I spoke to people in different parts of the world after those incidents, and some of them were deeply concerned about where we were and about the message that was being sent out. Political stability must be uppermost in the message that we send out above all else. Silly things that are being raised here about flags are just really daft.

Mr Ross mentioned pay and conditions. I assure him that my party's response has always been to look after people and ensure that they have proper pay and conditions and are treated fairly by their employers.

Mr Dunne did a great broadcast for Derry. We will have to get you to the next fleadh, Gordon, whenever it comes; it will be well worth it. He referred to important things around EU funding, which is a key part of the issue. We cannot be left in a position where — Ms McLaughlin referred to it many times in Committee — the likes of Trinity College in Dublin draws down far more moneys under framework

programme 7 than did the whole of the North. That is a ridiculous situation, which leaves us in a position where a key element of research, innovation and development for the economy is not being dealt with. I have spoken to the Minister about that, and I am assured that she has this well under her brief at the moment. We will see from the beginning of next year how that pans out with Horizon 2020.

Mrs Overend referred to the issue of jobs promoted versus jobs created, the jobs fund, infrastructural needs and the issue of electricity and office accommodation. Mr Lunn referred to the imbalance and, again, key issues such as infrastructure and linkages.

Mr Frew did a great job to promote north Antrim. I really do not think that people can be sore in this debate. We have to be sensible, pragmatic and promotional, particularly on the whole question of investment.

Ms McLaughlin emphasised the need for jobs promoted and jobs created and for regional disparities to be addressed. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister agreed the jobs strategy and signed up to promote it. Perhaps she could have a word in someone else's ear about Derry and the inequities in investment there.

Mr Wilson did a great job of promoting his own Minister and complimented her on the job that she is doing.

Mr Ramsey brought us to a crucial area: the existing skills deficit and skills mismatch. Again and again, we are told that, whenever people go looking for jobs, for one reason or another, those who have been turned out with skills qualifications have either received the wrong qualifications or inadequate qualifications that do not allow them to move into the labour market.

Mr Anderson referred to kindergarten economic thinking. Had he been listening last week to Professor Neil Gibson, who is also the economic adviser to the Executive, he would have heard the very clear message about what investors want when they come here. They want to hear about the circumstances around investment packages and investment for roads, water and accommodation and office accommodation, which I trust that the Minister has under her hat at the moment. Likewise, however, they want to hear about education, schools, health and the environment.

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

Mr McGlone: Those are crucial issues for them.

I will wind up on one final note. I was listening very carefully to what the Minister said about Smart regions and so forth. I will wind up with a quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt, who said:

"Great minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Small minds discuss people."

I hope that when —

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

Mr McGlone: — we reflect on Hansard, we will come to some conclusion about that as well.

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

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted that the motion turned into such a positive and constructive debate, as is always the case.

Turning to the comment that the new Member for South Belfast made about flags, I think that we could have a debate on flags and there would not be as much animosity between the parties over what is a previously agreed position to tackle regional disparities. That is clearly a Programme for Government commitment. Despite a number of speeches and pre-written speeches that were read out very quickly from Members on the opposite Benches, I still do not understand why the DUP is opposing the motion. However, that is what it is going to do.

Last Friday in Enniskillen, along with Joe Byrne from the SDLP, Thomas Buchanan from the DUP and Ross Hussey from the Ulster Unionist Party, I engaged with over 120 young people from across Fermanagh and south Tyrone and west Tyrone. That meeting was arranged by the Peace and Reconciliation Group in conjunction with the Assembly's Education Service. A range of questions were put to the audience, one of which was whether they thought that they would still be living in Fermanagh or Tyrone in 10 years. Of those young people, 78% said that they did not think that they would be living there, mainly because of the lack of job opportunities.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily.

Mrs Foster: Was that the same conference at which the Member told young people that the only thing that I had brought to Fermanagh was fracking?

Mr Flanagan: Yes.

Mrs Foster: When did the fracking start in Fermanagh?

Mr Flanagan: The Minister is nearly correct, except for the tense. It was a passive tense and a present tense, as opposed to a past tense.

Over 80% of those surveyed indicated that they did not think that the Minister or the Department were doing enough to create jobs in Fermanagh and Tyrone. So, that is not a Sinn Féin position or an SDLP position. It is the view of the people in the wider community that Invest NI and the Department are not doing enough to bring jobs and investment into rural and deprived communities. That is where the motion comes from. It is not some attempt to attack any Minister in a party political way. We are calling on the Executive to do something; we are not highlighting the failures of any one Minister or government agency. In my opening speech, I highlighted some of the good work that Invest NI has done and some of the major improvements that have been made. I recollect — *[Interruption.]* Is the Minister going to listen, or what is the story?

Mrs Foster: So, you contradicted yourself by —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. Other Members may ask him to give way.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I happily will, Minister. That is better.

Mrs Foster: The Member contradicted himself in his own statement by saying that the only positive thing that I had brought to Fermanagh was fracking, and he then went

on to talk about the good work that Invest NI has been engaged in.

Mr Flanagan: Aye; dead on. *[Laughter.]* The Minister was too busy tutting during the debate to listen to what people were saying. She was tutting, sighing and putting her head up in the air. That is not going to work. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Flanagan: Perhaps the Minister would like to reflect on what has been said by looking at Hansard and to reflect on what has been provided in the lengthy job creation document.

When representatives from Invest NI last appeared before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, they presented us with a green glowing sheet of everything that they had achieved. They told us how they have outperformed against most of their targets, apart from the one that was held up as the result of a legal challenge that was largely outside of their control.

In the Committee room, there was unanimous support for and expressions of happiness at how well Invest NI had performed on the wider economic front. However, when it comes to the Programme for Government commitment to address regional imbalance, the Department has failed. The DUP seems to be opposing the motion —

5.15 pm

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will not, Paul, no.

The DUP seems to be opposing the motion because it calls for an action plan to deal with a previously agreed Programme for Government commitment. I suppose that that is nothing new to us here.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will not be giving way, because I have an awful lot to get through.

In his contribution, Gordon Dunne rightly highlighted the fact that it is not easy to attract jobs and investment. He praised the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and all of us would support that. Those three Ministers in particular have done an awful lot to get out around the globe and sell this place and everything that we have to offer, and that is on record in the House on a number of occasions. However, once we convince them to come here and to invest here, it is about more than just sending them somewhere in Belfast where there are already plenty of jobs. Getting them out into areas where there is a real shortage of jobs, where people are forced to live on the dole for years on end or are forced to emigrate because there are no jobs, is the real challenge that has been set aside in the agreed Programme for Government. That is what needs to happen.

Paul Frew got very excited in his contribution and spent five or six minutes talking about what we had said. I thought that he was making the winding-up speech on the motion. However, he did not once mention anything that Invest NI had done to tackle regional disparities, and that is the thread that ran through all the DUP's contributions. Not one of them defended the fact that Invest NI has not brought a single investor into Fermanagh or Tyrone in the past four years.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I cannot, Paul, no. I am delighted to see that Sammy Wilson is taking part in debates as a Back-Bencher, because I really enjoy his contributions. However, poor ol' Sammy picked an unfortunate village in Fermanagh to try to convince people to bring jobs to, because another failing of the Minister is in dealing with the issue of mobile phone coverage. Sammy said that we should set up a factory in Derrygonnelly, but there is not a single drop of mobile phone coverage in the village, so how would anybody establish a mobile phone factory there?

Mr Storey: That is your experience of the Carphone Warehouse. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Flanagan: That is right, Mervyn. Good man.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr Flanagan: Sammy Wilson's thread was — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members. There should be courtesy in the Chamber at all times.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Deputy Speaker for trying to bring a bit of control, but it is clear that Members opposite really cannot defend what is going on here, so they are trying to deal with other issues. If, as the DUP claims, regional disparities do not exist or, worse, that they are not important, even though tackling them is a commitment of the Programme for Government, why do we constantly hear unionists complaining on the radio, on the TV and in the Chamber about the absence of European Peace funding in some unionist areas? Worse still, in recent days we have heard unionists say that the social investment fund needs to be broken down and based on people's religion instead of people's actual need, which is completely wrong.

Pat Ramsey highlighted the failure to bring forward a subregional strategy to deal with the strengths that any particular area has. Regarding the review of public administration and further powers that could be transferred to councils, there is an opportunity here for councils to do an awful lot more to pinpoint any given area's strong point and work with Invest NI and the Department to profile that area. What is going on at the minute is that Fermanagh is being promoted as a stretch of water with a big fancy hotel beside it, and that is it. After four years of being a Minister, she has brought something forward called a Smart region, but she still has not brought a single investor into County Fermanagh or County Tyrone.

Sydney Anderson said that the motion was churlish, petty and negative. That was all that I heard of his contribution. There was no justification for those comments.

In her response, the Minister misread the motion. Perhaps if she lit a few more candles, she would know what we were talking about. The Minister said that we keep asking the same question and that we should just simply listen to her. Perhaps we are not getting a satisfactory answer and not enough is being done to meet the Programme for Government commitment to tackle regional disparities, because that is what we collectively have signed up for, and that is what we need to address. I do not understand why there is such a sense of defensiveness across the Benches about addressing regional disparities.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I have already said that I am not giving way, and I am not going to give way.

The failure to invest in rural communities such as Fermanagh and Tyrone and in deprived communities such as Derry and west Belfast, has not gone unnoticed. It has been going on an awful long time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members.

Mr Flanagan: It has not just been happening since 2009. It is a much longer-term problem than that. It is a real culture that we here need to address collectively. That is why addressing regional imbalance was a key component of the Programme for Government. We hear all this fancy talk about rebalancing the economy, but that is really a right-wing way of saying, "Let us cut the public sector." That is not what it should be about at all. It should be about trying to get balanced growth in the economy in all communities and not simply by cutting the public sector. That is not what rebalancing the economy is about. It is about growing the private sector in all areas and transferring public sector jobs into each one of our communities.

As regards what Paul Frew and Arlene Foster said, different messages seem to be coming out. Arlene Foster spent most of her 15 minutes talking about that Smart region in Fermanagh. It seems to be all that she has to talk about — apart from the G8, which she did not do. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Flanagan: Paul Frew said that we should not focus — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members. Allow the Member who has the Floor to finish his speech. We are all meant to treat each other with respect at all times.

Mr Flanagan: Paul Frew said that we should not focus on individual reasons. However, that is just what the Minister has done. Of all of the contributions from DUP Members, not one single Member put forward any kind of defence as to why no foreign investors were brought to places such as Fermanagh, Tyrone and Derry. That really says it all.

In her contribution, the Minister said that I was wrong to say that the Invest NI delegates would stay in the hotel and that she would see to it that they would be taken out of the hotel. That is probably correct: they will probably be brought to the Giant's Causeway and the Titanic centre, as always happens.

My final point is that Arlene Foster says that Invest NI does not promote the North. We all know that. It promotes only certain areas of the North. That is the whole problem. That is the reason for the debate.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister,

Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKevitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Ms Maeve McLaughlin.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern at Invest NI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs created as a result of government intervention; notes the absence of any Invest NI-facilitated visits to some constituencies in recent years, by potential foreign direct investors; welcomes the Programme for Government 2011-15 commitment to address

regional imbalance; and calls on the Executive to publish an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs.

Adjourned at 5.49 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 22 October 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

Advancing Shared Education

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar an tuairisc faoi chur chun cinn an oideachais roinnte a d'fhoilsigh grúpa comhairliúcháin an Aire i mí Márta. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the report of the ministerial advisory group on advancing shared education, which was published in March. In doing so, I will set out my response to the recommendations and will indicate how I intend to move forward.

Advancing shared education is one of the most important and sensitive challenges facing civic society. If we are to succeed, there must be a shared readiness to change. Members will recall that advancing shared education is at the heart of the Programme for Government, and establishing the independent advisory group was a key commitment. I was very pleased when Professor Paul Connolly from the School of Education at Queen's University agreed to chair the group, and when his fellow members Dawn Purvis and P J O'Grady also took up the challenge. I thank them for their work and for producing a very comprehensive, thoughtful and thought-provoking report. I also thank everyone who engaged with the group for their contributions.

In debating the report, let us remind ourselves of why sharing is important and of what we are trying to achieve. My starting point is the educational case for sharing, to contribute to raising standards, tackling underachievement and creating a better society for all. In planning for the future, we need to address a key question: what sorts of schools do we want? We have many different types of school, each proud of their identity and ethos. I know from my visits how much parents and communities value those schools and how passionately they care about them. So, having that choice in our system is a strength. We need to now build on that with confidence that a shared education system is inclusive of all and marginalises no one.

However, choice cannot be at the expense of good education. Our schools need to change, and greater sharing is part of that change. We have too many schools that cannot by themselves provide the rich, high-quality educational experience that our children need and deserve. To make that change, we must actively plan for shared education. That means that we must also move away from planning by competition, school versus school and sector versus sector in a battle for scarce resources.

As Minister, I see far too many development proposals that are written as if the school up the road does not exist. That has to change.

We know that parents and children want quality, high-performing schools in their local communities. The parents and communities that I meet are up for sharing. They want choice, but they are not asking for separation. I believe that the vast majority of parents put quality first. They will choose shared local schools if they provide a quality education. Tá an fhianaise ann. The evidence is there.

The Lisanelly complex has fired the imagination of the community in Omagh and is a game changer for how we plan education. I have seen other good examples of communities in the Moy, in Fermanagh and in Ballycastle, coming together to look for shared solutions and finding new ways to ensure access to good local schools. So, shared education is not a bolt-on or optional extra. It is fundamental to delivering good schools and central to my vision that every learner should achieve his or her full potential.

Good education comes first, but equality and good relations add to the case for change. Choice cannot be at the expense of good education, and neither can it be at the cost of separation by religious belief, socio-economic status or educational needs. Such separation is bad for children and bad for society. Separation is damaging, unnecessary and avoidable, and society has the power to change it if the will is there.

In higher and further education, sharing and integration is already the norm. Why should schools be any different? We have sharing in preschool education and youth services. We have integrated schools, naturally shared schools and many other examples of good practice in schools working together. However, we can, and we must, do more. Sharing must become the accepted reality at every stage of education, from early years to postgraduate study.

There is also a persuasive equality case. We have good schools serving children of every religious faith and none. Today, no child is denied a good education because of their religion; however, the same cannot be said for socio-economic status. We know that children living in lower-income brackets are at much higher risk of educational underachievement. Members are familiar with the standard measure. Our aim is that every child should leave school with at least five good GCSEs, including English and maths. Today, only 34% of children who are entitled to free school meals achieve that. For other children, the figure is 68%. So, a child from a lower-income bracket is at double

the risk of underachievement. That is unacceptable, and we must change it.

We also know that academic selection is a barrier to children on free school meals and from lower-income families. Just over 7% of children in grammar schools are entitled to free school meals. For other post-primary schools, the figure is 28%. So, poorer children are more likely to be rejected by grammar schools. Is that what those schools want? Only they can answer that question, but segregation by parental income is a reality that we cannot ignore.

Members know my views on academic selection, and I will say more on that in a few moments when I turn to the recommendations that are contained in the report. Whatever happens in relation to selection, we need greater sharing across the socio-economic divide. I am sometimes accused of having an anti-grammar agenda. Let me put it on the record once again that I do not. I have an anti-academic selection agenda. I offer this challenge to grammar schools: educate the whole community, not just a part of it. Across the world, the best-performing education systems combine excellence with equality of outcomes. In other words, almost all their pupils achieve high standards, not just a few. That must surely be our goal, too.

Bringing all that together, it is clear that sharing brings educational benefits; sharing builds respect for diversity and good relations; sharing builds equality; and sharing builds a confident community. So, my vision is one of education without barriers; good schools where children learn, grow and develop together and where sharing is the accepted normality. Shared education can and should involve every type of school. It is about developing local solutions to local needs, not one size fits all. It is a challenge to all but a threat to none. Every school can share, and I challenge every school to ask itself what more it can do.

Before turning to the recommendations in the report, I want to talk about the relationship between shared education and the integrated sector. Let me make it clear: they are different routes to the same objective. The right model is the model that enjoys the support of the local community. Integrated education will continue to play an important role, and my Department, in line with its statutory duty, will continue to encourage and facilitate it.

Shared education should also be encouraged and facilitated, and communities should be encouraged to choose the model that suits them best. That is in line with the current approach to integrated education, where the transformation process begins with consultation with the local community and a parental ballot, before the submission of a development proposal to the Department.

Every community should be on a journey to sharing. Different routes will be chosen, and some will get there sooner than others. When a community takes a step, however modest, we should encourage and support it, and, yes, perhaps challenge it to go further, but in a positive manner.

I will now turn to the recommendations contained in the report. The report contains 20 recommendations in five groups. I welcome all the recommendations. There are some that I accept fully and will aim to take forward as soon as possible. There are others that I accept in principle, but there may be a better way forward than what

the group recommended. A third group needs further consideration and debate here in the Assembly and across our society.

The recommendations begin with mainstreaming, which is the right starting point. We need to ensure that sharing is in the DNA of our education system, in legislation, policy and the structure of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). I want to be in a position to bring the Education Bill back to the Executive and the Assembly in the coming weeks. However I cannot do that on my own.

In bringing the Bill back, I propose to include a statutory definition of shared education and provisions for ESA to encourage and facilitate it. Those will complement the provisions on integrated and Irish-medium education, and will not reduce or dilute them in any way. I will also require ESA to reflect sharing in its structure, in its corporate plans and in its strategies, and I will hold it to account for doing so.

The report also recommended the inclusion of a shared-education premium in the common funding scheme. I accept that in principle, but further consideration is needed before we move to implementation. However, I acknowledge that, if shared education is to grow and develop, we will need to mainstream financial support for any additional costs involved. Shared education is very much at the heart of the Together: Building a United Community programme.

In addition to those programmes, my Department is working with Atlantic Philanthropies and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) with a view to putting in place an additional funding programme to support shared education. As we move ahead, I will look carefully at the evidence so as to ensure that whatever financial support we provide is targeted at what works best. I also need to see what additional resources my Executive colleagues will make available for mainstreaming.

The second group of recommendations deals with supporting schools, ensuring that sharing delivers real educational benefits, and recognising and promoting the spread of good practice. I also welcome those recommendations. I have asked the chief inspector to consider how best to take them forward in the inspection process and the inspection cycle, and to report back to me.

We ask a great deal of our teachers, and it is right that we equip and support them to deliver. That is why ESA will have statutory duties to ensure support for teachers and schools' governors. I also welcome the recommendations on supporting and developing teachers. Those will be fed into a revised teacher professional development strategy, which is already under development. I will ensure that it includes an examination of how best to equip and support teachers to deliver shared education.

The third group of recommendations — 9 to 14 — focus on what schools need to do in relation to engagement with parents, the delivery of the curriculum and the rights of children and young people to participate in the decisions that affect them. I welcome those recommendations.

As I said earlier, supporting schools will be a key part of ESA's role, and that will include supporting schools to communicate with parents.

Recommendation 10 calls for a review of the delivery of key aspects of the curriculum. I accept that

recommendation in principle and welcome the emphasis on promoting equality. However, taking that forward requires careful thought. In any review of the curriculum or its delivery, our aim must be to support teachers to adopt best practice. Therefore, as a first step, I have asked the chief inspector to carry out a survey of current practice, with a particular focus on what additional support and development teachers need.

The report draws attention to the right of young people to participate and be heard in relation to the decisions that affect their lives. I support that, and my aim is that every school will have an effective method of encouraging young people's participation in the life of the school. My Department will continue to encourage schools to implement the Democra-school programme and to take up the advice, support and a guidance pack available from the Commissioner for Children and Young People. However, I believe that effective participation of young people is likely to be achieved more effectively if the approach is decided by the schools, rather than being imposed from outside. Therefore, I would prefer not to go down the compulsory route at this time. However, I will keep that under review, and if sufficient progress is not being made, I will consider the case for stronger action.

10.45 am

The report also recommended that schools should be subject to the statutory equality and good relations duties in section 75. I strongly support the intention behind that recommendation. Every school must play its part in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. Every school must tackle discrimination and bullying, whether it stems from religion, sexual orientation or any other aspect of a young person's identity. Members will be aware that this is a cross-cutting matter, as equality legislation is the responsibility of OFMDFM.

I want to discuss recommendations 12 and 13 of the report with my Executive colleagues and consider how best to give effect to them. Using section 75, which sets out minimum requirements, might be one option. However, there is nothing to stop us from enhancing our equality duties so as to ensure better policymaking. Another way might be to adopt the approach used in England, where schools have to set clear objectives for promoting equality and are held to account for their delivery. Whichever option we choose, I want the emphasis to be on action not bureaucracy.

Recommendation 14 deals with special education. It calls for the development of effective models of collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools and educational support centres. One of my priorities as Minister has been the building of an inclusive educational culture within and between our schools. Therefore, I strongly support the recommendation. However, it would be wrong not to acknowledge the work already being undertaken in that area.

The current special educational needs (SEN) framework already promotes inclusion, ensuring, wherever possible, that children and young people are taught in mainstream schools. That will remain a fundamental tenet of the work being taken forward as part of the SEN and inclusion review. That being said, where a child's best interests are served by attendance at a special school, that option will remain open.

In respect of the collaboration across sectors, special schools are full and active members of the area learning communities. That is essential to provide opportunities for pupils to learn and grow alongside their peers in special and mainstream schools. Going forward, I will ensure that shared education projects and shared education campuses will include special schools where that demand exists. Arvalee special school will be taken forward as part of the Lisanelly shared education campus, with the construction of the new Arvalee school and resource centre commencing next year.

The fourth set of recommendations — 15 to 17 — deal with area planning, which will be central to the delivery of shared education. I will make it a priority for my Department to bring forward guidance on a range of sharing options that schools and communities may wish to explore; clear, practical advice on how to bring forward a development proposal for sharing; and guidelines on the development of area plans to ensure that shared education is encouraged.

Recommendation 16 calls on my Department to meet parental demand for different types of schools. In principle, I accept that recommendation, with one important caveat. Any proposal for a new school must be sustainable and capable of delivering high quality education for the pupils it serves. Let me say clearly that I want to see collaboration, not competition; and sharing, not duplication.

Recommendation 17 calls for it to be made easier for a school to transform its ethos from one type to another. I am pleased to say that the Education Bill already provides for that. Every school will be able to decide its own ethos and set that out in its scheme of management and its employment scheme. Any school will be able to change its ethos at any time, simply by bringing forward new schemes. There will be no need for any complex or bureaucratic legal procedure.

Finally, I turn to recommendations 18 to 20, which deal with academic selection. It will surprise no one when I say that I welcome and strongly endorse those recommendations. Some have criticised the group for including them and claim that they have nothing to do with sharing. Those people are missing a very important point. Sharing means educating without barriers and without segregation. The group's advice is very clear: selection discriminates, selection divides and selection is a barrier to children from low-income families. Those who ignore the evidence should ask themselves this: if segregation by religion is wrong, how can segregation by income be right?

I look forward to the day when this Assembly decides to end academic selection for good. Until that day, I will strive to make it irrelevant and limit the damage that it does. I will continue to promote all-ability schools where academic and vocational learning is the norm. Such schools will be taken forward through area planning, as recommended by the advisory group.

In conclusion, the report asks us all to think differently about the delivery of education. It reminds us that sharing begins with respect for diversity and the right to equality. It asks us to put the needs of young people ahead of the interests of institutions, and it challenges long-held assumptions about what is possible. Through sharing, we all benefit and no one loses. Sharing means celebrating diversity, not undermining or hiding it. Educational ethos,

like language and culture, should be used to build bridges, not barriers. Our education system should be enriched by diversity and not blighted by separation. Molaim an tuairisc don Tionól. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I apologise to the Minister and the House that I will not be able to stay for the remainder of questions to the Minister. Unfortunately, I have to leave because I promised to attend something.

I have come to the House, listened to the Minister and read the statement that he made. It is extremely disappointing that, yet again, he has lit the touchpaper and created more contention and controversy around an issue on which there should not be controversy. The Minister is under extensive pressure in relation to the common funding formula, and he would have been better spending his time in Rathgael House, addressing that problem, rather than putting other problems on the table today.

On behalf of the Committee, I can say that we should celebrate the growth and popularity of sharing among schools that have been successful in that regard. Indeed, reference has been made to the work that is done in places such as Ballycastle in my own constituency.

The Committee took evidence from the ministerial advisory group in May, and decided to undertake an inquiry into shared and integrated education later in the session. It seems that, when the Education Committee announces that it will undertake an inquiry or considers tabling a plenary debate, there is action from the Department on that issue. I am glad, in one respect, that the Education Minister seems to be paying attention to what goes on in the Committee.

The Minister appeared to indicate his support for recommendation 17, which suggests that a transformation process should be put in place to allow schools to adopt an alternative ethos. The Minister also referred to the existing development proposal process for transformation to integrated status.

Is it the Minister's intention that the implementation of recommendation 17 will replace the current development process? Is he, therefore, able to alter the process by which popular oversubscribed schools will be allowed to expand, as recommended in the report? Will the terms of reference of the reported ongoing review of the development proposal process include all that?

Mr Speaker: The Member is out of time.

Mr Storey: Has the Minister noted the legislative proposals in Scotland to take the Minister out of such contentious development proposal decisions completely?

Mr O'Dowd: That was quite a lengthy contribution. I am not sure what the controversial part is because the Member did not get to that bit. In relation to pressure —

Mr Storey: *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to answer.

Mr O'Dowd: Pressure goes with the job. The important thing is how you deal with it. I can assure you —

Mr Storey: You do not deal with it too well.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: I can assure you that, as was recently evidenced in the media when I challenged political parties to come forward with alternatives to my proposals, they are left fumbling somewhat.

Mr Storey: *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: You have another three days to come forward with alternatives to my proposals on the common funding formula, and I wish you well with that.

Mr Storey: *[Inaudible.]* Those days are over.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr F McCann: You are doing nothing.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

Mr F McCann: You are doing nothing.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, Chair. I am not sure what the Member's position is on the shared education report because I have yet to hear a formal response from him or his party. The shared education report is thought-provoking and challenges us all. There are challenges in the report for all parties around the Chamber. It deserves to be studied closely and given the respect that it is due. As I stated in my response to the report, it should form an integral part of our education system moving forward.

It is OK to stand up in Castlereagh and make a statement about shared education, and it is OK to make commitments in the Programme for Government. However, if you are serious about shared education, it is much more than a green-and-orange issue. Rift lines run through this society that relate not only to orange and green but to those who have and those who have a whole lot less. Unless we deal with that, we will leave behind a large section of society, which will be to the detriment of this entire society. So the ministerial advisory group took that on board and brought that challenge to the Assembly and to all involved. We have to answer that challenge and deal with it.

As for taking Ministers out of decisions, and out of this, that and the other, I got involved in politics to make decisions. I was elected by the people to do so, as was everyone in the House. When those decisions get difficult, you do not opt out of them. You make a decision on the basis of evidence, believe that it is the right decision and stand by it. That is what politics, leadership and being in a Minister's post is about. I will not accept any proposals to take Ministers out of decision-making roles. That is democracy at play, and I will not accept any dilution of democracy in that role.

I have said that I accept recommendation 17. The Education Bill, which is gathering dust somewhere, deals with that recommendation. If you want to deal with it, bring the Education Bill forward, and we will deal with it.

Mr Storey: I can assure you that there will be more dust after this.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not debate across the Chamber. The Chair of the Education Committee has had quite a bit of latitude this morning, as all Chairs of Committees normally have when it comes to ministerial statements. However, from here on in, let us have questions on the statement.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I echo the Minister's comments in thanking Paul Connolly, Dawn Purvis and P J O' Grady for their work. Indeed, it is commendable that the group not only has included socio-economic integration but has put it at the heart of what shared education means. The media and those who are disengaged from the debate are often consumed by a false ethnic debate over shared versus integrated education.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr Hazzard: Not a problem. Indeed, the fundamental driver of raising educational attainment is undoubtedly the importance of socio-economic integration in our schools. Will the Minister ensure that, as he advances with shared education, all barriers in our system, be they ethnic or economic, will be removed?

11.00 am

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. As I posed in my statement, if Members believe that segregation by religion is wrong, how can they believe that segregation by income is right? That is the challenge for the Assembly. Facts and figures may get in the way of a good argument, but no one has been able to challenge the facts and figures that I have produced on education underachievement and the detrimental impact that it is having on families from lower income backgrounds.

The Programme for Government not only sets us a target on education, shared education and improving education it also sets a specific target, in its opening paragraphs, on tackling social deprivation and sets challenges for me on social deprivation.

The ministerial advisory group has come forward with a well-researched and well-informed report on sharing education in its totality. Those who are serious about sharing education need to study the report in detail and if they disagree with its findings they need to come back with an evidence-based response to those findings, instead of what we have been hearing since the report was challenged and what we have heard in the Chamber this morning.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his statement.

Díreach, ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire an aontaíonn sé liom go bhfuil sár-obair déanta ag na coistí foghlama ceantair agus, go deimhin, ag tionscal oideachais roinnte Ollscoil na Ríona. Arbh fhéidir leis a rá an mbeidh níos mó airgead ar fáil, nó cad iad na hacmhainní breise a bhéas ar fáil le roinnt an oideachais a chothú?

I am sure that the Minister will agree that the area learning communities have laid down the foundation for shared education and should be congratulated, as is the case with the shared education project at Queen's University. Will he give us more detail on the financial package that will be available to advance shared education?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question. We are currently in discussions with Atlantic Philanthropies, along with OFMDFM, about investing a significant amount of money in shared education programmes. I do not want to go into any more detail than that, because the discussions

are at an advanced stage and all partners to those discussions are working towards a successful conclusion.

On the question of mainstreaming funding in the future, the common funding formula, as we know, is currently under review, but it can be reviewed on an annual basis. First, we need to move the definition of shared education forward as proposed in the ESA Bill so that we will have a legislative basis on which to judge projects that schools and communities are bringing forward for shared education. That will allow us to build criteria and fund those projects.

My focus at the moment on funding is to continue those discussions with OFMDFM and Atlantic Philanthropies, get a legislative designation of shared education and move forward to including that in a future common funding formula review.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the statement and most of what has been included in it but, unfortunately, the Minister has reverted to type on academic selection, which is an issue that seriously undermines the report and his otherwise positive statement.

Will he explain how, in principle, he accepts recommendation 16 to meet parental demand but then states that he will strive to make selection irrelevant? What about parental demand in Craigavon, which shows overwhelming support for the Dickson plan?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for her question. She welcomed the majority of the report and dismissed the rest but did not give any evidence as to why she dismissed it. I assume that she is talking about the last three recommendations. Where is your evidence to dismiss them? Where is your evidence to dismiss the evidence not only in this report but in numerous other local and international reports? Where was your evidence to dismiss that of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child? The Member can stand up and say that she dismisses something, and she is perfectly entitled to do that. However, in a political debating chamber, there is an onus on you to stand up and to present the evidence for why you dismissed it.

The report refers to parental choice, but it does so in the context of all children and all parents having a choice. The system that the Member appears to be wedded to does not present choice or equality for all. The evidence shows that time and again.

I have to say that I welcomed your leader's contribution to the education debate on Saturday when he spoke of how the 11-plus was a blunt instrument. He quoted something that I have often said myself, which is that the exam asks whether you are clever instead of how you are clever. My response to that is that it is the role of all schools to develop that in every child. That should not be a barrier to a child getting into a school. I welcome Mr Nesbitt's contribution to that debate, and I think that we need to expand on it.

Mr Lunn: I largely welcome the statement and the report. It is very refreshing to see a report on shared education that, on the same page, fully acknowledges the position of integrated education. Recommendation 16 deals with parental demand, and, in line with that theme, which runs through the report, and with the theme of the ease of transformation and so on, will the Minister assure us that, if integrated schools want to expand in the future due to

parental demand — I am not talking about new ones — he will see to it that they are given every opportunity to do so?

Mr O'Dowd: The current method by which schools expand is through the development process. I have committed to reviewing that. In answer to the Member's question, we also have a statutory obligation to facilitate and promote integrated education. My Department takes that very seriously, and I assure you that any proposal from an integrated school will be read through those policies. We have a responsibility to allow those schools to expand and to meet parental demand for integrated education.

Mr Craig: Minister, I note that, in your statement, you said that recommendation 3 refers to the:

"inclusion of a shared education premium in the common funding scheme."

You also said that you would carefully consider that. Will the Minister not also consider a carefully targeted premium for underachieving schools? I assume that the Minister's real target is to improve achievement in our schools, no matter what sector they come from.

Mr O'Dowd: I included such a proposal in the current review of the common funding formula, and the Member's party has lambasted me for doing so.

I am not going to fund schools simply because they are underachieving. I will want to know that any further funding that goes to schools will be used to raise educational attainment. It is part of a programme of raising educational attainment that I and my predecessor have developed over the past number of years. It is closely aligned to Every School a Good School to ensure that there is community involvement in our schools and that communities and parents are encouraged to become involved in and take ownership of education. So, I would not argue for one moment that more funding on its own is the answer to raising standards. It is part of a programme of policies that will raise standards and that is required.

I have answered on my deliberations on the premium going forward. I have strongly argued that, if we are going to raise educational attainment, particularly among socially deprived communities, we also need to resource it. However, those resources need to be carefully monitored and to have outcomes.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

The Minister's statement rightly welcomes the good work of the independent advisory group on shared education. I put on record my thanks to organisations such as the Fermanagh Trust Sharing Education Programme, which is funded through Atlantic Philanthropies and which has very much been leading the debate on shared education across religious and social divides. The Minister highlighted that. Does he agree with me that sharing across the border, which the Fermanagh Trust Sharing Education Programme has trialled, is also an avenue that we need to go down and that, where it is in everyone's best interests, it should form part of any plan to deal with the future of shared education?

Mr O'Dowd: I also place on record my appreciation to all the organisations that have been involved in shared education programmes down through the years. I will not mention any specific bodies, because I may leave

someone out and cause unwarranted offence. Therefore, I congratulate all the groups and funders involved.

Shared education is not a new idea. The need for greater collaboration and sharing between the different education sectors that we have on the island dates back decades — even before partition. We have to mainstream it, resource it and drive it forward, and there has to be the political will to do that. I confirm to the House that I have the political will to do it, and the House and the Executive need to back that up in order to move it forward. As with any policy, there may be different points of view on different parts of it, but I think that the House can get behind the main ethos and the main policy.

As to sharing education across the border, of course that is part of sharing education. The border has had a detrimental effect on the socio-economic well-being of many border communities. If we can overcome that in education terms, I am happy to support it.

Mr Wilson: I assume that the statement was written by the Minister and not by civil servants, because I do not think that any would put their signature to such an ill-thought-out statement.

I want to ask a fundamental question, especially since funding, planning and even the existence of schools will depend on whether they are regarded as being shared schools. In his statement, the Minister indicated that he believes that division can occur on the basis of religion, income, ability, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity. Is he saying that he is now going to expect every school in Northern Ireland to have a quota of people who fall into those categories, or is this simply rhetoric, and schools can continue to do whatever they want and admit whomever they want? Only one of two ways is available. Either you have —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Wilson: Either there is a way of measuring shared education or this is a meaningless document. If it is the former, will the Minister tell us whether he is about to introduce for shared education —

Mr Speaker: I must now insist.

Mr Wilson: — a quota on the basis of the divisions that he outlined in his statement?

Mr Speaker: The Member must finish.

Mr O'Dowd: It appears that civil servants wrote the Member's statements when he was a Minister, but that is up to him. I would not read out a statement unless I was comfortable with it. I suspect that the Member has read out a number of statements that he was not comfortable with.

In answer to his question, I am not sure. Do you want me to introduce a quota or do you not want me to introduce a quota? I am confused, because you seem to be condemning the quota idea, and then you seem to be condemning the idea that there is no quota. The Member needs to read the statement in its totality, and he needs to go back and read the report.

The definition of shared education is "driven by communities". We are telling communities that this is our definition of shared education: if communities and schools can come together, and they fit into the definition of shared education. It may be two out of three, three out

of four, or four out of five. However, I am not suggesting that we introduce a quota. Why would I suggest that? This has to be driven by the communities involved in shared education. We have to have something against which we can measure schools' contributions to the shared education debate. We have a definition, on which I am bringing forward further guidance, and we will bring forward further guidance still when we mainstream funding towards shared education. When the Member makes up his mind whether he wants me to introduce a quota or not, he can come back to me.

Mr Byrne: Given that the Minister has outlined the merits of shared education, which I think is regarded as good in theory, and given that the Lisanelly project in Omagh has largely been welcomed by the local learning community, what timescale does he envisage for getting some practical work done on trying to implement the shared education strategy, because timelines and money will be crucial?

Mr O'Dowd: Shared education is rolling out as we speak. I would like to see a legal definition put in place through the ESA Bill. However, if the ESA continues to be delayed, I will consider bringing forward legislation to introduce a definition of shared education separate from the ESA Bill, as I place such importance on it.

Let us use Lisanelly as an example. Demolition work starts at Lisanelly this week. That is a firm sign, in one sense, that work is beginning and that construction will take place. We are clearing the site, and construction on Arvalee School will commence in 2015 or thereabouts. Therefore, money is being pumped into the project. We are in advanced discussions with OFMDFM and Atlantic Philanthropies about bringing forward funding for shared education. There is a rolling programme of work on shared education going on as we speak.

11.15 am

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement. Does he agree that our grammar schools must be encouraged to participate fully in the sharing agenda to the benefit of our entire community?

Mr O'Dowd: Without doubt. No school should be allowed to stand on its own at the expense of schools around it or the broader community that it serves. The figures on socio-economic sharing are stark. The average free school meals entitlement in grammar schools is 7%. The average for post-primary schools is 28%. No one has yet challenged those figures or suggested that they are wrong. That is a challenge for the grammar schools. If grammar schools want to educate the entire community, they need to take action to educate the entire community.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. He outlined a vision of shared education that is much more realistic than comments others made. The Minister puts heavy emphasis on the Education and Skills Authority. It may be asking the obvious, but how long can he run and continue to fund that in shadow form? When will he bring back the legislation and how does he hope to get it through the House?

Mr O'Dowd: I have a position paper that, I believe, is a significant compromise on my behalf. It allows others, in my opinion, to offer goodwill to the Education Bill, but that is a matter for them. I cannot bring the Education Bill back to the House unless the Executive approve it. To do that,

I need to get the Education Bill on the Executive agenda. That has not been achieved. This cannot go on forever. The Executive need to make up their mind about whether they want to deliver that Programme for Government commitment. That day of realisation is coming to us.

I suspect that we will not now meet the Programme for Government commitment to have ESA established in 2013. These are the last weeks in October. I have a Programme for Government commitment signed up to by all Executive parties to have it established by 2013. I suspect that that target is now missed. If it is missed, the Executive will have to make up their mind on whether they want to continue with it or set it aside, but it is coming to make-up-your-mind time.

Mr Allister: It is quite clear that the Minister knows that he has lost the argument on academic selection, hence his desperation to distort the issue by suggesting that it is a question of segregation by income. Thousands of children will sit selection tests in the coming weeks. How many questions will ask them about the income of their parents? Is it not quite clear that testing is about aptitude and ability? Why is the Minister trying to distort the issue by pretending that it is selection by income when it is nothing of the sort?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member has a reputation for having a mind that interrogates subjects. Why he chooses to turn off his mind when it comes to academic selection is beyond me. The Member is a barrister and he works with and presents evidence. All the evidence shows that academic selection has everything to do with income and absolutely nothing to do with educational ability. All evidence shows that.

As soon as a child from a lower-income background walks into the assembly hall and sits down in front of the unproven, unregulated test, they are being economically tested. The evidence shows that by the outcomes of those tests. It shows by the very fact that the average for grammar schools for free school meals is 7% as opposed to 28% across society. International evidence shows us that children from lower economic backgrounds are at greater disadvantage in education than in any other sector.

So, when the Member is standing in Twaddell Avenue, Portadown town centre and on other roads telling the Protestant working class that he is looking after them, you are not kidding anybody because you are leaving those people behind time and time again every time you use the false argument that academic selection does not disenfranchise anyone.

Mr Moutray: The Minister states that he will continue to promote all-ability schools where academic and vocational learning are the norm, and that that will be taken forward through area planning. If such all-ability schools are rejected by the overwhelming majority of people, will he endeavour to force them on a community? I think particularly of my community in the Dickson plan area.

Mr O'Dowd: There is another one defending the Protestant working class. Huh? You are not interested in the Dickson plan; you are interested in two schools in the Dickson plan, namely Portadown College and Lurgan College. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: Those are the only two schools that you are interested in in the Dickson plan area. So, let us dispel the myth that you are defending the Dickson plan because you are not. They just happen to be the schools that one of your major funders is also interested in.

Mr Speaker: Let us have remarks through the Chair.

Mr O'Dowd: But, in relation — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Allow the Minister to speak. The Minister must be heard. Let us have all remarks through the Chair.

Mr O'Dowd: Through the Chair, the Member knows fine well who his supporters are and who is backing some of the false and disgraceful arguments that are being presented in the media.

Mr Anderson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister —

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Allow the Minister to conclude. Order.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is opposed to all-ability schools. What is his opposition to all-ability schools? Surely the purpose of education is to allow all people of all abilities to flourish and enrich themselves.

Mr Moutray: One size doesn't fit all.

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member responds:

"One size doesn't fit all."

It is a pity that the leading economies and the leading education systems in the world all disagree with him. It is proven, not by Sinn Féin research or Department of Education research but by international research, that those schools that have an all-ability mix flourish and that those young people in them who are academically gifted do better than they would do if they were closeted away in schools that claim to be academically superior. So, all that evidence suggests that you have got it wrong, but the argument does not suit you and it does not suit your party's supporters, and by, "party's supporters", I mean your funders. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr O'Dowd: It does not support the narrow agenda that you are driving forward. That is the problem. Not the facts, not the evidence, not the support material and not the research. It does not suit your narrow agenda.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the Minister's statement and recognise the work of the ministerial advisory group and the shared education programme at Queen's University, which is doing exceptional work in this area.

In his statement, the Minister said that we do not want an education system that is blighted by separation, and the First Minister has said that it is fundamentally wrong that our education system separates our children on the basis of religion at such a young age. How will the Minister reassure people who say that these proposals fall far short of the fundamental change needed to address that separation?

Mr O'Dowd: Time and time again in this society, it has been proven that you need to encourage and facilitate

communities to move forward. I accept that communities are often ahead of the politicians. The shared education report allows for the encouragement and facilitating of communities to move forward and challenges communities and politicians to move forward at a pace that has not been seen in the past.

I want to see an education system in which we are not separated by religion, ethnicity or socio-economic background. We have not achieved that yet, but the shared education report and my responses to it allow us to move forward at a pace that will achieve that goal in the short to medium term. That is where we need to focus. We may argue over the last three recommendations in the report, but there are 17 other recommendations that have general support in the Assembly and need to be driven forward.

OFMDFM is backing up its calls with finances and is supporting us in our discussions with Atlantic Philanthropies. It is also encouraging all Ministers to play their part in building a united community. This is one of the building blocks in building a united community.

Mr Speaker: Order. That concludes questions on the ministerial statement. Members know that points of order are not taken during ministerial statements, but I will take Mr Anderson's point of order now.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. During the Minister's reply to my colleague Stephen Moutray, he made a number of references to the funding of my party. Is it in order for the Minister, in the Chamber or otherwise, to make references to supporters of parties when a Member asks a legitimate question and expects a responsible answer? The continual casting across the Chamber of references to supporters and personal attitudes needs to be looked at.

Mr Speaker: This is a debating Chamber, where there is an exchange of views. The Member has put that on record. I think that that is more important than anything else.

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

Mr Speaker: Is it further to Mr Anderson's point of order?

Mr Moutray: In his answer to the question that I raised, the Minister indicated that I was interested in only two schools in my constituency. I refute that. I work for every school in my community. The Minister might be embarrassed about the situation that he has got himself into with the maintained sector. However, he will not destroy the controlled sector in my constituency.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, the Member has put that on record.

Mr Flanagan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Moutray said that he refutes the allegation that the Minister made. I ask you to review Hansard to see what Mr Moutray actually said because I think that you will find that it was unparliamentary language.

Mr Speaker: Order. I continually read Hansard. Let us move on.

Planning Bill

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): As the House is aware, the Planning Bill completed Consideration Stage on 25 June. Since I took over the portfolio of Minister of the Environment, with responsibility for planning, I have carefully considered the provisions of the Bill and taken time to meet key stakeholders and listen to their views. I have reflected at length on the purpose and intent of the Bill when it was agreed with the Executive and introduced to the Assembly in January this year, and I have looked back to the Second Stage debate. I will quote my predecessor Alex Attwood, who summed up the purpose and intent of the Bill at that time when he said:

"It takes the elements that will be put into place and puts them into place now in order to ensure that the councils and councillors have a better planning system that is more fit to serve the interests of ratepayers post 2015."
— [Official Report, Bound Volume 81, p72, col 1].

The Bill, as introduced, included two provisions that had not featured in the Planning Act 2011. First, in preparing planning policy and plans, the Department should do so with the objective of promoting economic development. Secondly, when it comes to the determination of planning applications by the Department and, in future, by the councils, material considerations will include a reference to any economic advantages or disadvantages that are likely to result from the approval or refusal of planning permission. My predecessor, rightly, supported those provisions because they affirm what already happens today, which is that economic considerations are material when it comes to determining a planning application or framing planning policy. That does not give determinative weight to economic considerations in making a planning decision but it means that they are a material factor, along with other material factors that are part of the planning system. That is what the Bill states; it does not state more than that.

I will move on to amendments 20 and 26, which were tabled at Consideration Stage. Those amendments were the subject of great concern to many Members. Indeed, the debate went on for a considerable time over two days. Despite, in my view, the weight of argument being against the amendments, they were voted for and now stand part of the Bill.

Since taking office, I have held meetings with key stakeholders, including representatives of the business community in Northern Ireland, local government, environmental groups and academics from Queen's University and the University of Ulster in order to listen to their thoughts on the Planning Bill, as amended at Consideration Stage.

11.30 am

I have carefully and fully studied the legal advice obtained by my predecessor, and I have made that advice publicly available. I have deliberated at considerable length on those amendments and still have serious concerns, which are held by many of the stakeholders. My concerns are threefold: legal; procedural; and evidential.

I will begin by addressing the legal concerns. Clause 15, as amended, will limit the right to judicially review certain planning decisions taken by OFMDFM, the Department

or a future council. The legal advice that my predecessor received is clear on the amendment. That advice has been shared with Executive colleagues and others who requested it, and I believe that it is important to share it with all Members. Therefore, I have deposited a copy in the Library.

I will once again quote extracts from that advice for the record. It states:

"Planning decisions are generally regarded as determinative of civil rights ... However, judicial review is generally required to secure compliance with article 6 of the ECHR since decisions by government (local or national) are not considered to be independent, i.e. not independent of the executive."

If JR is restricted to EU and ECHR grounds then we do not consider that this would secure compliance with article 6 ECHR except in a narrow group of cases. JRs on traditional common law grounds of breach of procedural requirements, failures of consultation, Wednesbury unreasonableness and the like would not be within the narrow grounds permitted unless they overlapped with a permitted ground, e.g. some grounds relating to natural justice might overlap with article 6 ECHR. Even challenges based on ultra vires would be sought to be excluded."

Our view is that the exclusion proposed in terms of the grounds of challenges would amount to incompatibility with the ECHR and thus fail the legislative competence requirements of s.6 of the Northern Ireland Act".

I also have concerns about the economically significant planning zone amendment, and the legal advice that my predecessor received confirms those concerns. Again, I will quote an extract from that advice. It states:

"There are problems with European obligations in that proposals envisage that planning permission will be granted by the designation of the ESPZ for whatever is specified in the scheme."

The advice continues:

"There is no exception made for sites designated pursuant to the Wild Birds Directive (special protection areas) or Habitats Directive (special areas of conservation) which have the protection of Article 6(3) ... of the Habitats Directive ... Since those provisions prohibit the grant of consent unless there are no likely significant effects caused to the designated site by the development or, following an appropriate assessment, it is found that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the site, article 13A(2)"

— that is article 13A(2) of the Bill —

"would be in breach of the Directive".

The advice goes on to state:

"This would expose DOE to challenge to the legality of the provision and expose the UK to infraction proceedings by the Commission. In our view the proposals would fail the legislative competence requirements of s.6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998".

Returning to clause 15, I believe that we should exercise caution in relation to restricting the right to judicially review

planning decisions. The Consideration Stage debate reflected very clearly the concerns of many Members of the Assembly. Not often do I agree with him, but on this occasion, I am compelled to agree with Mr Allister when, at Consideration Stage, he said:

"the courts have played a vital role as a restraint on the abuse of executive power, and that is why the function of judicial review has evolved over many years. However, the obvious effect and purpose of amendment No 26 is to remove from the citizen the right to have recourse to that remedy in the manner that he or she currently has." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 86, p365, col 1].

That view is also held by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which recently wrote to me on the matter and stated:

"judicial review plays an important and legitimate role in ensuring the proper administration of government and Clause 15 would, in effect, remove the court's ability to review the legality, the rationality and the reasonableness of planning decisions."

I am also conscious of the views of the honourable Mr Justice Treacy, a senior judicial review (JR) judge in Northern Ireland, who earlier this year, in addressing a seminar, spoke on proposals to reform judicial review in England and Wales. His opening remarks sum up my concerns, and I will quote him:

"Judicial review is the principal means by which citizens can access the historic constitutional role of the courts to protect against abuses of power by public authorities. It is a vital safeguard, it promotes the public interest, encourages public bodies to act lawfully and within their powers, ensures such bodies are not above the law and protects the rights and interests of those affected by the unlawful exercise of power."

He also added:

"Lord Woolf, the former lord chief justice, and Lord Goldsmith, the former attorney-general, have warned that the government should proceed with "caution" with any changes that could be seen as restricting the right to hold politicians to account."

Clearly, these are matters that should greatly concern the Assembly. I do not believe that it is appropriate or sensible to bring forward provisions that fail the legislative competence requirements of section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and run the risk of exposing Northern Ireland to infraction proceedings.

I will now outline the procedural concerns that I have. It is, of course, legitimate for amendments to be made during the passage of a Bill through the Assembly. However, those two significant amendments go far beyond what would normally be tabled at Consideration Stage, and I am concerned that they were never subjected to the full rigours of public consultation, Executive consideration or Environment Committee scrutiny. I do not, therefore, believe that the threshold for proper consultation and participation on those amendments has been met.

I will now deal with my evidential concerns. I wholeheartedly agree that the planning system has a role to play in facilitating economic development. There is

clear evidence that we are responding to that imperative. As a result of vigorous action by my predecessor, which I intend to continue, the planning system is now much better placed to support economic development and provide greater certainty on outcomes and time frames for managing applications.

There are numerous examples of how planning has delivered approvals for key projects quickly. For example, the Peace Bridge in Derry has gone from receipt to approval in 11 weeks. There has been a £30 million redevelopment of Windsor Park football stadium in 11 weeks, which prompted the 'Belfast Telegraph' to say that it was a pity the Northern Ireland team cannot play with the same focus and pace as the Department of the Environment's (DOE) Planning Service. A £70 million regional radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital was approved in 11 weeks. The northern portion of the Narrow Water Bridge was dealt with three weeks sooner than by An Bord Pleanála in the South. The peace building and reconciliation centre at Maze/Long Kesh was approved in five months, and the relocation of Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to Maze/Long Kesh was approved in less than six months.

In May 2011, there were 60 article 31 applications in the system, and, to date, a further 11 applications have been received. Of those 71 applications, 40 have been determined, reducing the number of article 31 applications in the system to 31 at present.

Just yesterday, I announced permission for a huge mixed-use development in Newtownards that will transform the now derelict Crepe Weavers factory site and could provide up to 400 jobs and give a tremendous economic and social boost to the area. That decision is further evidence of my determination to clear the backlog of planning applications and to provide a planning system that can deliver.

Since I became Minister, a number of other major significant applications have been approved. A 120-bed hotel and over 22,000 square feet of office development have been approved in Newry. That project is estimated to cost in the region of £12 million. Other approved applications include those for 11 separate storage and distribution units at Nutts Corner roundabout near Antrim; a multimillion pound mixed-use development at Glenmona in west Belfast that includes housing, a hotel, an education campus, local retailing, recreation and community facilities; and a new £20 million data centre in Coleraine. The latter is the first of three phases in the development of a data hub capitalising on the Project Kelvin high-speed transatlantic communications link. That application was turned around in just nine weeks. Such speedy decisions emphasise my Department's commitment, and my commitment, to assist business and to help strengthen our economy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: It also demonstrates that such applications are being handled consistently within the Programme for Government target to ensure that 90% of large-scale investment planning decisions are made within six months and that applications with job creation potential are given additional weight. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the planning system now effectively and demonstrably supports economic development. I am determined to work with all parties so that it can be further improved.

Judicial reviews are often high profile, but the reality is that they are relatively few in number. Although the Executive and, indeed, any Minister responsible for planning, might not always welcome such challenges, it is fair to say that such a process is a fundamental right of citizens. I could go a step further and say that the potential threat of judicial review has been one of the key reasons why the planning system has remained fair and objective. Over the past three years, there have been fewer than 20 judicial reviews of the 44,000 decisions that the Planning Service has made. That is a tiny fraction of the total number of decisions. It seems to me that restricting the right of citizens to challenge planning decisions is not only incompatible with our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights but represents taking a hammer to crack a very small nut.

It is also a fact that the grounds for the most significant and high-profile planning JRs of recent years would be unaffected by these amendments, which acknowledge that a right of appeal to the High Court must remain where there is a question about the compatibility of a decision or determination with EU law. Such issues of EU law have been key grounds for many of the JR challenges to high-profile planning decisions of recent years. However, other grounds would be affected: for example, decisions that are made outside of legal powers or where the decision was plainly irrational.

As regards the proposal to introduce economically significant planning zones (ESPZs), I remind Members that existing provisions in the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 empower the Executive, through my Department, to make simplified planning zones, which are not materially different from ESPZs. Indeed, the amendments brought forward on ESPZs appear to have been largely duplicated from the earlier legislation. A simplified planning zone allows the planning authority to bring forward a scheme for an area that has the effect of granting planning permission to certain classes of development, as set out in the scheme, without the need to apply for planning permission. If simplified planning zones have been on the statute book for so long, it begs the question of why neither I nor any other planning Minister under direct rule or devolution has been approached about using the power. If it was considered that the exercise of such power should be a key feature of the economic package agreed with the London Government, why was my predecessor not simply consulted about how the law already in place could be activated? I would be very happy to consider any such approach. However, it is now clear that the intent of the amendments on ESPZs was not to introduce new planning powers but simply to make OFMDFM a new planning authority in Northern Ireland.

11.45 am

Bearing all that in mind, I see no good reason to introduce ESPZs and to vest such planning powers in another Department. It would introduce only confusion into the planning system. Furthermore, in considering the previous Planning Bill, the Assembly decided that the power to put in place simplified planning zones should transfer from my Department to local government as part of local government reform. What is now proposed in the amendments stands in stark contrast to the Executive and Assembly's decision to empower local government to bring forward zones of that kind. Therefore, it is an attempt not

only to grab existing planning powers from my Department but to disempower future local government.

I am committed to local government reform, and I am the Minister responsible for driving that agenda to a satisfactory conclusion by April 2015. In agreeing the previous Planning Bill, the Assembly agreed that my Department should transfer the vast majority of the Department's planning powers to councils. That is the correct thing to do. I am concerned that the ESPZ amendment will dilute the Executive's commitment, endorsed by the Assembly, to transfer planning powers to councils. The amendments are contrary to the principles underlying the devolution of planning powers from central to local government, and that concerns me greatly.

When Arlene Foster made her statement to the Assembly on local government reform on 31 March 2008, she said:

"our vision is of a strong, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of all citizens at their core." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p2, col 1].

She also said:

"Successful local councils must be effective local champions that respond to the aspirations and concerns of their communities and guide — in partnership with others — the future development of their area. Strong civic leadership must be at the heart of the new council arrangements." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p2, col 1].

In addition, when Edwin Poots moved the Second Stage of what is now the Planning Act 2011 in December 2010, he said:

"The Planning Bill sets out proposals to transform our planning system. It provides for a transfer of better, faster development plans and development management functions to councils. That means that the councils will be the planning authorities." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 59, p112, col 2].

He continued:

"The transformation is fundamental to the development of local accountable democracy. It puts power and responsibility for the development of local areas exactly where it should be: in the hands of locally elected representatives accountable to the people." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 59, p112, col 2].

The ESPZ amendment runs counter to that vision. It disempowers local councils, allowing OFMDFM to dictate what it thinks is best for local communities and what development can go ahead in a council's area without any form of recourse. As Members will appreciate, I have grave reservations for legal, procedural and evidential reasons about the amendments to the Planning Bill to do with ESPZs and the restriction of the right to judicial review. Therefore, after very careful and lengthy consideration, I have decided not to move the Planning Bill to Further Consideration Stage either now or in the future.

I intend to continue to make prompt and sound planning decisions through the development of a single strategic planning policy statement to create a planning system

that is fast, fair and fit for purpose — one that delivers for business, but not at the expense of our planet or our people. As Environment Minister, I want to help to create a better environment and a stronger economy. Regrettably, the Bill, as it stands, does neither.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive statement, which I very much welcome. I congratulate and commend the Minister on his courage to stand up to others who want amendments to take away civil liberties and the rights of citizens to bring judicial reviews. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Ms Lo: However, the —

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, to be clear, is the Member speaking as Chairman of the Committee or is she speaking as an individual MLA?

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the Member will make it absolutely clear whether she is speaking as Chair of the Committee or as a Member of this House.

Ms Lo: I am speaking as the Chair of the Committee. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member was called as Chair of the Committee. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Lo: Thank you, Mr Speaker. During the scrutiny of the Bill, the Committee received —

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. The convention is that no points of order are taken during a ministerial statement. I made that clear to the House during the statement from the Minister of Education. I am happy to take points of order after questions on the statement are concluded. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Lo: Thank you for that clarification, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: It would be useful to the House if the Member were to state clearly that she is speaking on behalf of the Committee — again, for Members.

Ms Lo: I am speaking as the Chair of the Committee, and if I may finish my sentence — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Lo: The Committee took a long time to scrutinise the Bill. Although it is quite a short Bill, we received an extremely large number of responses from the public and stakeholders. Many of them expressed grave concerns about the amendments, as did the Minister, and about the new provisions in the Bill. As Chair of the Committee, I received a large number of e-mails and other correspondence after Consideration Stage about the two new amendments. I was extremely concerned about the lack of public consultation on the two amendments that were proposed at Consideration Stage. As Chair of the Environment Committee, I have the right to say that I have reservations about two amendments not being subject to enough public consultation.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am hesitant to intervene. I am listening to the Member very carefully. Is the Member asking a question on behalf of the Committee or is she asking a question as a private Member?

Ms Lo: I will ask a question as Committee Chair. Obviously, the Planning Bill is meant to bring forward a number of aspects of the Planning Act 2011, and, largely, the Committee supports the Planning Bill. Now that the Minister is withdrawing the Bill, what about the other elements in it? Clause 5 is about pre-application consultation with the community. Clauses 7 and 8 are about the power of the Department to deal with repeated applications. Clause 9 is about the power of the Department to require developers to reinstate land that has been used for mineral extraction.

Clause 17 promotes the positive management and enhancement of conservation areas, and clause 20 — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: Is a question due?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is coming to her question.

Ms Lo: How will the Department deal with all those elements? The idea was to bring forward those elements so that they are embedded in our planning structure before the new councils take over planning powers.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chairperson of the Environment Committee for her question and for her warm welcome to my statement, which is not how I expect it to go down in all quarters today.

I am fully committed to the reform and improvement of the planning system. I am determined to incorporate the elements that you outlined in the original Planning Bill into the planning system through the continued development of the single strategic planning policy statement. I am determined to work with all sectors to ensure that the planning system that we get in place for transfer to local councils is as close to perfect as it can be.

I am aware that Ms Lo and others proposed an amendment at Consideration Stage to introduce a duty on the Department, in exercising its functions, to do so having regard to the desirability of promoting the shared use of the public realm between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. My predecessor gave a commitment at that time that, although the amendment was not made, he would try to incorporate it. I reaffirm that commitment; it is important that we do so.

Ms Brown: Unlike the Chair of the Committee, I will speak as a Member of the House and, unlike her, I am deeply disappointed at the Minister's statement, which, for me, flies in the face of the democratic legislative decision of the Assembly. What approval was sought from the Executive on the decision? Were they even consulted?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Ms Brown. I am sorry to disappoint you. That is a bit rich, when we look at the lack of consultation on the amendments that have made the Bill the toxic legislation that it now is. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: The amendments derailed the attempt to fast-forward the transformation and improvement of the planning system here. No, I did not raise this with Executive colleagues. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: I thought long and hard about my decision, which I arrived at over the weekend. However, to be accused of being anti-democratic is a bit rich, when the amendments were not subject to consultation with the Executive, the Environment Committee or even — as far as I am aware — the parties whose members tabled the amendments.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. I thank the Minister for his statement. I put it on record that I believe that the amendments are compliant with EU obligations. I do not think that any Member of the Assembly would try to subvert or avoid EU obligations. Has the Minister sought or received any legal advice from the Attorney General on the matter? Will he confirm whether it is consistent with any legal advice that he received from others?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Uasal Ó Baoighealláin as a cheist. I have not sought advice from the Attorney General, and nor have I received advice from the Attorney General. I received legal advice from an eminent QC in the field, which I have shared with the House and is available to the public. I have not heard any legal opinion that is contrary to that advice. Over the past four months, I spoke to many lawyers, academics and planning experts and received no advice whatsoever that the advice read into the record by my predecessor at Consideration Stage was erroneous or in any way challengeable.

12.00 noon

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister and welcome this important statement. The Minister outlined and placed on record the clear legal advice that his Department received in respect of the illegalities of the DUP and Sinn Féin amendments. Has he been shown OFMDFM's legal advice? Who provided that advice?

Mr Durkan: The short answers to those questions are: no and I don't know. As I pointed out, I shared the advice obtained by my predecessor. He read it into the record. I have not seen any legal advice received by OFMDFM or whoever brought the amendments, although, in an interview on radio last week, Mr Weir alluded to the fact that it was OFMDFM, but I have not seen that legal advice.

My door has been open for four months. People knew the legal position, as stated by my predecessor. My door has been open to seeing any legal advice to the contrary. I have not seen it. My door remains open to that legal advice coming forward. I am keen to work with anyone and everyone to ensure that we — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: — get this sorted and ensure that we have a planning system that is fair, fit for purpose and fast.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome the Minister's statement, which leaves me in no doubt that the proposed power grab by OFMDFM with regard to economic planning was so ill-conceived, so badly thought through and so arrogant that it was actually illegal? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Minister confirm to the House that he will stand firm in continuing to offer responsible leadership,

because, no doubt, he will come under various pressures to change his mind?

Mr Durkan: The Member used the term "power grab". That is not a term that I intend to use today. This statement is about planning; it is not about politics. I will stand firm to ensure that the planning system in Northern Ireland is fair and legal.

Mr Weir: I too am disappointed at the Minister's statement. He seems to have based a lot of it on legal advice. In answer to a previous question, he said that he had not consulted the Attorney General, who is the senior legal adviser to the Executive. Why did he not consult the Attorney General?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Weir. I had to make a judgement on the Bill in the best interests of the planning system, based on the evidence in front of me. I am not prepared to derogate from that responsibility or leave it to others. I want to look at the big picture, not just this Bill, but how it relates to the wider local government reform programme and the transfer of planning powers to councils.

The Bill is not good law, and I have yet to hear anyone, even today, try to claim that it is. It is not good for the planning system, and it is not good for the economy. That is what the business representatives that I have been speaking to are telling me as well. In fact, it would be counterproductive, by creating confusion. There are NGOs and groups queuing up to challenge the Bill legally, if it were to pass as it stands. How is that going to make things faster? How is that going to create more certainty in the system? How is that going to promote inward investment, help development and create jobs? It is not.

Lord Morrow: I think it is most significant that the Minister did not think it worth his while to consult the Attorney General, but, in his statement today, he was careful to quote what Justice Treacy had to say. Alas, however, he did not say everything that Justice Treacy said. May I remind him? This decision was taken subsequent to the Treacy ruling, which indicated that a Minister who failed to bring a controversial decision to the full Executive was in breach of the ministerial code. Why, then, is the Minister defying that ruling today and deliberately breaking that ministerial code?

Mr Durkan: I dispute that I am breaking the ministerial code. I wonder whether advice was sought from the Attorney General on the amendments before they were tabled. If not, why not? If so — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr Durkan: If so, why? When the public hear the accusation that I might be breaking the ministerial code, they will rightly ask, "What is the ministerial code?" If someone is deemed — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: If someone is deemed not to be in breach of the code for denying someone else the right to donate blood based on their sexuality or for promoting public disorder, they are not in breach of the code but for trying to prevent bad law from coming in, I am?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: I do not think so. I can act only on the legal advice that I have seen. I am certainly open to hearing other legal advice, and I have sought it from many places, but that is not one.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh chinneadh an Aire gan dul ar aghaidh leis an Bhille seo faoi mar atá sé leasaithe. Go deimhin, chuir mé spéis sa mhéid a dúirt an tAire faoi na limistéir phleana, agus ba mhaith liom ceist a chur air ina dtaobh. Does the Minister agree that the amendment on economically significant planning zones (ESPZ) was, in fact, a spurious proposal, given that the power already existed under the provision for simplified planning zones in the 1991 Planning Order?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist shuimiúil sin. I tried to get it in Irish, but I did not know the word “spurious”.

Mr I McCrea: He will understand it.

Mr Durkan: I do not understand it in English. In the absence of any detail and information on what will constitute an ESPZ and the type of applications that will qualify, there can be no guarantees, assurances or clarity about how the provisions will help the economy. No one has established the benefits or costs of the proposals, who they will benefit or who they will harm. In fact, in my opinion, the clauses are largely replicated from the simplified planning zones but without the safeguards that existed in those zones for areas of special scientific interest and habitats. That is why I do not see any merit in the amendment and why I am happy to speak to anyone about dusting down the provisions from the 1991 Planning Order to see how we can make those best work in a way that will deliver for the economy while protecting the environment.

Mr McCallister: What a shambles, Mr Speaker. I congratulate the Minister on his solo run and for having the courage to stand up to this Administration. Does he agree with me that the attempted power grab effectively amounts to the Government scuppering their own Bill? Does that not highlight the dysfunctionality of this Administration?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McCallister for welcoming my statement. However, let me assure you, Mr McCallister, that this is not a solo run. This is supported, and it will be supported, by many in the House and by many more outside the House. I do not want to go down the lines of a power grab. In response to an earlier question, I said that I believe that the Bill, which is a noble attempt to improve the planning system, has been derailed by these amendments.

Mr I McCrea: Given that, in the past, the Minister has described the use of a petition of concern as putting up two fingers to other parties, can the Minister not see the hypocrisy in his statement today? How many fingers is he putting up to other parties?

Mr Durkan: Sorry, Mr Speaker, I am just trying to count my fingers. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: I recall my description of the abuse of a petition of concern as such, not the use of a petition of concern. It was abuse of a petition of concern — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: — when it was able to be used by one party to thwart the wishes of other parties in the Assembly. As it stands, the majority of parties in the Assembly will be behind me. They will give my statement the thumbs up and not the fingers.

Mr Ross: The Minister made much of the perceived limit on judicial reviews and said that it would restrict the rights of citizens. I am quite sure that the Minister is aware of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act that was passed by the Assembly. Section 19 of said Act limits a judicial review to 14 days. If that Act is legally competent, why does he believe that the amendments proposed to the Planning Bill would not be?

Mr Durkan: I have quoted legal advice that I received. I can go back and get legal advice on Mr Ross's question, and I will endeavour to do so. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: Let us look at the issues. There are European Charter issues — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor. If a Member asks a question, the Minister must then be heard. Order.

Mr Durkan: The restrictions on judicial reviews or the right to judicial review in the amendment are in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights. That is the legal advice that I received. That has also been reaffirmed to me by the Human Rights Commission.

Mr Beggs: As a former member of the Environment Committee, I was fortunate to benefit from some knowledge and experience of the Scottish planning system. Does the Minister believe that, by modernising and updating our legislation, it is possible to build a much more responsive local government-based planning system in Northern Ireland that can meet the needs of industry without trampling on the individual rights of citizens?

Mr Durkan: I fully believe that that is possible. The Planning Service has been working towards that, and it is something that I aspire to.

The Member pointed to how well planning is working in another jurisdiction. Let me be quite clear: planning is working well here. It is working a lot better here than it was. The past two years have seen dramatic improvements in the processing and approval of applications. I aim to continue that trend, and I hope to have the support of all Members in doing so.

Mr Clarke: I have listened to the Minister today, and he has said on a few occasions that he is happy to speak to anyone. Given the concerns that his Department has about the Bill and the amendments proposed at Consideration Stage, what discussions have taken place with those who tabled the amendments or with any other Department?

In one of the last paragraphs of his statement, the Minister talks about “prompt and sound planning decisions”. You referred to article 31 applications, of which the previous Minister had 71. It is almost as if your position today was a prerequisite for you getting the post after he cleared his desk. In one of those applications, on which you suggest there was a prompt decision taken, there were 4,500 objections to a business that no longer existed. Was that a good decision made by the Planning Service?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Clarke. I am not sure to which article 31 decision the Member is referring. I wonder whether it is one that my predecessor inherited from his predecessor. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What guarantees were provided by the proposers of the new clause — now clause 4 — that the proposed establishment of economically simplified planning zones was not a recipe for a free-for-all for frackers?

12.15 pm

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr McGlone. Go raibh maith agat. As I stated earlier, I have received no details, guarantees or information about what will constitute an ESPZ and what applications will qualify for that status. In the absence of any details, nothing, including fracking, in my opinion, could be ruled in or out, especially in light of comments by colleagues from across the Chamber about the economic significance of fracking.

Mr Frew: I am disappointed by the Minister's statement. If the Minister has concerns about some clauses of the Bill, and the supposed illegality of those, why has he decided to end it now? Why not go through the process, keeping the Bill as it is, and seek legal advice on those clauses?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Frew for his question. I did not want to waste more time on this Bill, or have the House or my officials waste time on it. My officials are drawing up subordinate legislation for the transfer of planning powers to councils, in accordance with the 2011 Act. Had the Bill received passage, they would have had to do the same. That would have been a duplication of work, and I was not prepared to allow that to happen.

Furthermore, as I outlined earlier, had the Bill been approved by the House, I have no doubt that it would have been subject to legal challenge by people from outside the House, and possibly by some within it. That would have led to a complete slowdown of the planning system, which is entirely contrary to the original aim of the Bill.

Mr Agnew: I welcome the Minister's statement on behalf of the Green Party and many others outside the House. The Minister has made a sound, rational and, ultimately, correct decision. This House, as a legislature, has to act responsibly and within the law. Will the Minister confirm that it is the duty of all Ministers and Members to act within the law, legislate within existing laws, and not seek to circumvent the law to pursue a personal agenda?

Mr Durkan: Earlier, a question was put to me, and a question mark put over my adherence to the ministerial code. As an elected politician, a Minister and a person, I do not believe that anyone should break the law. My actions are not in breach of any code. Although it is important that our decisions are legal, it is most important that they benefit the people we represent. The Bill, as amended, was not.

Mr Craig: Minister, I have listened with interest to everything that you said about all this legal advice and, in some cases, the lack of it. You also mentioned that you had consulted businesses about this. I ask a very serious question: which businesses did you consult? Was one of them John Lewis? You have rhymed on and on about this wonderful planning system, but that application spent 10

years in the planning process and, ultimately, it did not happen. Did you consult John Lewis? What measures will you take to improve the situation? There is nothing in the existing planning process that would prevent a repeat of that fiasco.

Mr Durkan: No is the simple answer to that question; I did not consult John Lewis. Perhaps previous Environment Ministers consulted more with business than I do. However, in line with my predecessor's announcement, which accompanied the release of my Department's decision on the parts of the Belfast metropolitan area plan (BMAP) relevant to Sprucefield, I consider it appropriate to adopt a precautionary approach to major out-of-town retailing.

When we debate the future of town and city centres, I hear about the need to support town centres from all sides of the House, yet it seems that different rules apply when it comes to John Lewis. Currently, there is no application from John Lewis. If another one comes in, it will be looked at and be subject to the full rigours of the planning process.

Dr McDonnell: Is the Minister not just being a bit polite and gentle? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Minister agree that the amendments were crude, ill thought out and totally inappropriate and, quite simply, were made without any consultation with the public, the Assembly, the Executive or even with the First Minister or the deputy First Minister's parties? Does he agree that they were tantamount to a blatant power grab by OFMDFM with no respect for anybody? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: I thank Dr McDonnell for his question.

Some Members: What was the question?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: In response to questions from around the House today, I said that I do not want to get into finger pointing — or finger raising, Mr McCrea — about the intention behind the amendments. Others see it quite clearly as a power grab. I am not too concerned about my Department losing power, but the amendments would disempower local councils in future. That is not right, given that, two weeks ago, we voted to empower them.

Mr Dunne: Given the considerable debate that we had yesterday on economic development and the need for more foreign direct investment, what sort of negative message does this decision send out to potential investors who are looking at coming to Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Dunne for his question. I do not think that the decision sends out a negative message. It is important that we send out no negative messages. I outlined the steps that my Department has taken and the decisions that I have made to promote economic development. I outlined my concerns that the ESPZs will do nothing to speed up inward investment. Subject to a legal challenge, they will create only uncertainty. Any inward investor will look for certainty as well as swiftness from the planning system; certainty is even more important.

I want to get a message out today. I want anyone who is listening to the debate to be in no doubt that I support a

stronger economy. It is vital that the message goes out that Northern Ireland is open for business and is good for business. I want to make sure that that is reflected in the planning system.

Mr Anderson: I am also disappointed by the Minister's statement. If there were concerns about legal competence, why did he not follow normal procedure and seek to have the relevant clauses referred to the Supreme Court for a ruling and leave the rest of the Bill intact?

Mr Durkan: I spoke about the intention behind the Bill, which was to road-test the new planning powers that will be transferred to local councils in 2015. The fact is that, during the four months that have elapsed since the Bill's Consideration Stage, we are running out of road. The longer this goes on, the less point there is in bringing the Bill forward. Neither OFMDFM nor whoever tabled the amendments have been knocking down my door to ask me to bring the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement. I want to congratulate him; it is good to see a young, fresh planning Minister who can make decisions for Strangford and Newtownards. I very much welcome that. Will the Minister give us — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr McCarthy: We waited for a long time for the Newtownards development. Thank you. Minister.

Mr Speaker: Order. I encourage the Member to come to his question.

Mr McCarthy: Yes, Mr Speaker. Will the Minister give us a timescale for the introduction of the strategic planning policy? Will it be made before the new councils come into being?

Mr Durkan: I fully intend that the single strategic planning policy statement will be ready in draft form by the turn of the year. It will then go out for public consultation.

Mr Newton: Like many other Members, I express concern about the Minister's statement. Despite the fact that he has assured us that he is open for business and that he was "running out of road" as he put it, I think that many in Northern Ireland with an interest in the economy will be somewhat concerned about his reasons for the decision. Quite specifically, what consultations took place on the options for dealing with his concerns through amendments at Further Consideration Stage?

Mr Durkan: Forgive me, Mr Speaker. Let me use my relative newness in the job as an excuse, but I do not believe that the capacity exists to amend amendments.

Mr Attwood: I congratulate the Minister on strong, decisive and good government, unlike so much that passes for government around this place. Given that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister produced these amendments, never shared their legal advice on the amendments, never brought them to the Executive, the Environment Committee or asked any citizens or groups in this part of the world for their view on those amendments, does the Minister agree that, far from him failing in his duties as a Minister, people should look elsewhere for ministerial failure, in particular to the Office of the First and deputy First Minister and the role —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Attwood: — of the First Minister.

Given that the gaping hole in all of this is the failure of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to share their legal advice, despite the torrent of legal advice against their view —

Mr Speaker: Order. I now must insist.

Mr Attwood: — does that not reveal how weak, shallow —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must finish.

Mr Attwood: — and short-sighted this has been?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank you, Mr Attwood. It is not often that I disagree with Mr Attwood, so I will not start now.

Mr Speaker: Order. That concludes questions to the Minister on his statement.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order. Mr Speaker. A very serious situation arose during this item of business. I would like you to investigate the behaviour of the Chair of the Environment Committee. Her behaviour was an absolute abuse of her position as Chair of the Committee. Having been asked on a number of occasions whether she was speaking as the Chair of the Committee, she made it clear that she was. The inference, of course, was that she was speaking on behalf of the Committee and was articulating its views.

This obviously cannot go on. It was a blatant attempt to walk around the rules and the Standing Orders of the House. It has to stop and the Member's behaviour today has to be investigated. Will you assure the House that her behaviour today will be investigated?

Mr Speaker: Lord Morrow's point of order raises a number of issues. First, Chairs of Committees come to the House and indicate clearly to the Table that they want to be called as Chairs. I have always said to Chairs of Committees that they should ask questions on behalf of the Committee and should not make statements. Secondly, this is really an issue for the Committee to deal with and not the House. I think that it is important that I say that to Lord Morrow.

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is on a separate issue. Mr Speaker, I wonder whether you will also check Hansard to see whether the Minister was misleading the House. In an answer he gave a few moments ago, he indicated that neither OFMDFM nor the proposers of the amendments were knocking down his door to move the amendments forward. It is a matter of public record that I, as one of the movers of the amendments, asked a question for written answer of the Department in September about when he would table the Further Consideration Stage and got an answer.

I ask whether you could look at that, and I also ask that the Minister withdraw the accusations against the Members who moved the amendments.

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: I listened to the Member's point of order, and he needs to be careful about accusing the Minister of misleading the House.

Mr Weir: I am asking whether he has.

Mr Speaker: Yes, but we can leave the terminology aside. However, I am happy to look at Hansard and to come back to the Member or to the House.

The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the first item of business when the House returns will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Affordable Warmth Pilot Scheme

1. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the affordable warmth pilot scheme. (AQT 261/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

I thank the Member for the question. The warm homes scheme is our main fuel poverty scheme. That is targeted at privately owned and privately rented low-income households to improve their energy efficiency to tackle fuel poverty.

The initial target was to install energy-efficiency improvements in 9,000 homes. We have met that target year on year since 2009. The warm homes scheme contract is due to end in June 2014, so I have asked officials to review the scheme to see how we are tackling fuel poverty, taking into account current research that shows that over 33,000 households need to spend a quarter of their income on heating.

We recently completed an achievable, affordable warmth area-based pilot scheme in partnership with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the University of Ulster, the Housing Executive and 19 of the 26 local authorities. The aim of that approach was to deliver energy-efficiency improvements for homes in small, concentrated areas of fuel poverty, and to identify areas of poor housing and low income where you have that high prevalence.

The university evaluation of the pilot estimates that one in two of households contacted proved to be eligible for assistance from the warm homes scheme. A lot of the work was done in cooperation with Professor Christine Liddell of the University of Ulster, and it directed us towards area-based work, which seems to be much more productive in comparison with how things were being done.

From the initial positive results, we have moved to phase 2 of the pilot, which is to test that energy-efficiency measures can be delivered using local installers to carry out the work. That is encouraging and a good way in which to tackle fuel poverty.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware that the Department of Health, in partnership with the Public Health Agency, ran a scheme to issue Keep Warm packs, which was a low-level, low-tech way of tackling fuel poverty. Does the Minister see merit in his Department considering a low-tech option to help those struggling to heat their home this winter?

Mr McCausland: I am aware that the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland provided some low-income households with Keep Warm packs in recent years. As you indicated, they were very popular. I believe that the

Public Health Agency was able to identify funding for 2,500 to 3,000 Keep Warm packs for the scheme this year. The scheme is much appreciated and is effective.

I welcome that initiative. It is a good example of working in partnership with others to tackle fuel poverty. We recognise that fuel poverty is a priority. It is a key issue that needs to be addressed in a cross-departmental way, because the factors that create fuel poverty impact on the work of different Departments.

Welfare Reform

2. Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm when discussions, involving the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister, on a welfare reform package of mitigating measures for Northern Ireland concluded. (AQT 262/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This has been a major area of work for me and the Department over the past year. There were detailed, lengthy and intense discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) at Westminster. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) also has an engagement with the Treasury in that regard. At the end of June, we got to the point where we had had the negotiation with Westminster and the internal discussions with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. We also had discussions with the Finance Minister, and, at the end of June, we reached the point where we had a package of measures that, if implemented, would result in a much better situation for Northern Ireland than us simply taking welfare reform as it is in GB. They address the worst aspects of welfare reform whilst retaining the elements of it that are positive. That work concluded at the end of June.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Jimmy Spratt for a supplementary question. I urge him to try to steer away from the oral question on the same issue that is listed for later.

Mr Spratt: I will do my best, Mr Deputy Speaker, to not incur your wrath.

I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he not agree that there is an urgent need to share with the people of Northern Ireland the details of the package, because they would clearly demonstrate devolution delivering tangible differences to people's lives in the Province on something that has concerned people for quite some time?

Mr McCausland: Thank you for the supplementary question. The point is very well made.

By June, we had a good package of measures and interventions to make welfare reform much more suited to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. The question now that many people are asking is, "What is it?" I met the other week with the chair and chief executive of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, which is the voice and representative body of the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. They were keen that we get that information into the public domain, because there is uncertainty, which is not good.

There are concerns, which could well be allayed if people knew what the package was. There is also confusion as changes are implemented in Great Britain. Because of the nature of the technical side of delivering welfare benefits, information will come out to people here in Northern

Ireland that only applies to GB. We will then have to write out to them and say, "By the way, you received such and such a piece of information. That does not apply to you." So, the delay is actually creating confusion.

So, for all those reasons, it is important that we get that information out as quickly as possible to allay fears, provide assurance for people and avoid confusion.

Welfare Reform Bill

3. Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development when he will bring the Welfare Reform Bill back to the House, given that his colleague Minister Hamilton stated yesterday that the cost to the Treasury is running at £5 million to £6 million per month and that, if the Assembly does not legislate by January, that cost could quickly climb to £50 million or £60 million. (AQT 263/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have indicated that it would be good for the general public to be aware of the contents of the particular package for Northern Ireland for a range of reasons. The Member outlines an additional reason. The information that was passed on by the Finance Minister has been in the public domain for some time. The Prime Minister has spoken about it, the Secretary of State has spoken about it and other Westminster Ministers from DWP and the Treasury have spoken about it.

So, there is a concern that, over time, you get into a difficult position in terms of potential penalties. However, that is not just a matter for me; it is a matter for the entire Executive. Therefore, it is right and proper that, as soon as possible, we get this into the Executive and get it out into the public domain and into the Assembly for further discussion. That is a matter for the entire Executive, particularly OFMDFM, as well as me.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Given that we only have three months until January 2014, it is important that the confusion ends, as the Minister outlined in an earlier answer. That is absolutely imperative.

Does he agree with me that it is time that his Executive colleagues, with him pressing on this, actually grabbed the bull by the horns and made a decision before we simply run out of money?

Mr McCausland: In the past, I have commented on the potential difficulty with regard to penalties. I was accused of scaremongering in the Chamber by a member of another party. I think that the point was made yesterday that this is not scaremongering but a real potential difficulty that is coming down the track. However, apart from the penalty issue, there are all those practical, sensible reasons for moving forward on this. They are the ones that I have already outlined.

Co-ownership Housing

4. Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for his reaction to the Finance Minister's announcement yesterday of £5 million for co-ownership housing. (AQT 264/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I welcome the additional £5 million for co-ownership housing. I bid for £10 million, but, in a spirit of generosity, I got £5 million from the Finance Minister. I welcome that. There is real benefit from co-ownership housing. It has been extremely successful in the past. It

is a welcome investment, bringing more people into home ownership and providing affordable housing. It is also of great benefit to the construction sector. It has been important for that sector recently and will continue to be.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. In order to give a snapshot of the co-ownership situation, can he tell the House how many co-ownership homes have been provided since he came into office?

Mr McCausland: In the first year — 2011-12 — just over 500 homes were purchased through co-ownership. In the second year — 2012-13 — around 950 homes were purchased through co-ownership. I am glad to say that, this year, we are actually well ahead of our target, which was 500 homes in 2013-14. We are in line with those expectations. Already, we have delivered beyond that 500 by providing 540 homes. Approximately 650 more are in the process of having their application dealt with. Therefore, we are well on target. In fact, we are well beyond it.

Construction Sector

5. Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of this morning's news that the construction sector appears to be taking the first steps out of a recession that brought it to its knees, what efforts his Department has made to maximise opportunities with that sector. (AQT 265/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Like the Member, I welcome this morning's news about the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' survey, which says that the construction sector is exiting — in fact, it has exited — recession. That is good news. A rise in workloads has been reported for the first time in five years.

From my perspective, I will address what DSD has been doing in that regard. We have already talked about co-ownership. My Department has provided over £228 million in 2011-12 and 2012-13, which resulted in the building of 2,800 social homes, and over £83 million this year, with a target to start building 1,275 social homes. The social building aspect of the Department's work is only part of the picture. The construction sector has also gained through public realm schemes and neighbourhood renewal work. Over the past couple of years, around £50 million each year has gone into physical development schemes and a little more than £50 million into neighbourhood renewal schemes. All of those — whether it be the social housing sector, co-ownership, physical work, public realm work, neighbourhood renewal and so on — have certainly been of great help to the construction sector and have contributed to some degree to this morning's good news that it has exited recession.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes topical questions. We move to questions for oral answer.

2.15 pm

Portrush Harbour

2. Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Portrush harbour development project. (AQO 4853/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The regeneration of Portrush harbour is a priority for me, as I believe that the development of

the harbour will help to promote Portrush as a premier international destination. The extension and development of Portrush harbour was one of the proposals originally contained in the Portrush western peninsula strategy published by Coleraine Borough Council. A subsequent feasibility study carried out by the council showed that it was possible to extend the harbour, thereby creating a new commercial marine facility.

My officials have established a new programme board to oversee the strategic implementation of the regeneration initiatives in the Portrush strategy. The first meeting of the programme board, which is made up of senior representatives of DSD, DOE, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, DRD, the Tourist Board, the Strategic Investment Board and Coleraine Borough Council, will be held on 30 October — in a matter of days. Following that meeting, my Department will take the lead in carrying out an environmental impact assessment and an economic appraisal to identify how best to develop the harbour.

With any major development it is important that we learn from previous studies so as to create a facility that is commercially viable, helps to improve economic development and offers a wide range of community uses. The project will help to build on my Department's investment of £2.3 million in the public realm on the East Strand promenade and Station Square and the installation of free Wi-Fi for Portrush town centre and the beaches.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he ensure that Portrush harbour's economic potential is maximised and that the harbour is kept open and available to the public while the work is going on?

Mr McCausland: One of the key points in my initial answer was about learning from how such schemes had been done previously. There are lessons to be learned from how other harbour developments were taken forward, and I certainly think that they will be applied in the case of Portrush. We want to make sure that we get the economic benefit and the wider community benefits, as well as community access to the harbour, which is such an important part of the tourist experience for people who visit Portrush.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I should have advised Members that questions 1, 10 and 14 have been withdrawn.

Universal Credit

3. Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the consultation on flexible payment arrangements for universal credit. (AQO 4854/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I previously announced in the Assembly that I had agreed with Lord Freud, the Minister for Welfare Reform, a number of operational flexibilities for Northern Ireland in the payment arrangements for universal credit. Those flexibilities will allow for more frequent payments, direct payments to landlords and split payments.

My officials have consulted a wide range of groups in Northern Ireland through open public forums and an oversight group established under the chairmanship of the permanent secretary. There were also discussions with the Executive subcommittee on welfare reform and the Social Development Committee.

In recent months, the draft criteria have been finalised and now form part of a package of measures that I have negotiated with London and discussed with the First Minister, deputy First Minister and Finance Minister. I believe that the package will enable us to implement welfare reform in a way that will meet the needs of the people of Northern Ireland and produce the best possible outcome.

I have to say that I am frustrated by the lack of progress. As I have said, NICVA's chief executive expressed that frustration to me at our recent meeting. I believe that it is time to discuss and agree the proposed package not only to avoid the financial penalties that I mentioned, which could be imposed by Her Majesty's Treasury, but, more importantly, to start to tackle the real issue of helping people back into work. The universal credit aspect of welfare reform will remove the current disincentives that sometimes exist in getting people back into work. By removing those blockages through the introduction of universal credit, we can encourage and support people back into employment on the basis that, if you do more work — any work — you will always be better off than if you do not.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that. Minister, it is exactly 12 months to the day since you made a statement on the flexibilities for universal credit. At that time, you also committed to a programme of consultation on the criteria for flexibilities. As with most things, little detail has emerged. Will you give a commitment that the matters raised by the group that explored the issue at the beginning not only will be listened to but will be accurately reflected in the next version of the Bill and subsequent regulations?

Mr McCausland: I assure the Member that the consultations with a wide range of interest groups representing different sectors of society, different family structures, people with disabilities and all sorts of interest groups that have engaged fully in the process have very much been taken on board. People will have aspirations and wish lists, but some things may not be possible. However, when you look at what has been suggested and what we will bring forward in due course, you will see that we have paid close attention to the input that we received. I attended a number of the consultation meetings, some of which were in this very Building in the Long Gallery, and different aspects of the flexibilities were looked at. With such matters, it has to be borne in mind that there are flexibilities and advantages, but there may be associated costs. It is about finding the right balance between cost and benefit to make sure that we get the right deal for Northern Ireland. I think that we have a very good arrangement in place to bring forward in due course.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, you spoke in broader terms about welfare reform. Has your Department conducted any analysis of the loss of income to the people and families in the North who will be most affected by the welfare reforms that are being brought in by the Tory Government?

Mr McCausland: The answer to that is, of course, "Yes, we have looked at the implications of welfare reform very carefully". There are good parts of welfare reform and parts that are not so good. Alongside that, we have the Treasury's attempt to limit the increase in expenditure on welfare benefits over the next number of years. There are winners and losers in these things, which is often the case.

Some of the figures that have been quoted in the media about the cost to Northern Ireland have been unrealistic. One recent report quoted a figure of so many million pounds a year, but, when you drill down into the figures, you will see that there is confusion because they were mixing up figures for Northern Ireland with figures from GB. The number of people who will be affected by the benefit cap in Northern Ireland is a modest 620 households, and the impact per household is a lot less than in GB, where, in some areas, huge amounts go towards housing benefit. Some reports did not take the positive side of welfare reform into account. Also, some of the changes go back a number of years — in fact, they go back to the Labour Government — and were implemented when your party was in charge of DSD. Some of those things were counted in even though they have been in place for some time. We need to be careful that we make people aware of the issues and get accurate information out as far as possible without creating unnecessary fears. There are concerns that we all share, but we should not exaggerate them.

Mr Douglas: Will claimants have to apply for the flexible payment arrangements under universal credit?

Mr McCausland: My Department will automatically consider a flexible payment if available information indicates that it would be appropriate. If, for example, a claimant is known to have severe or multiple debts, that needs to be taken into account. Claimants will also be able to request a flexible payment at any time, and a referral for a flexible payment can also be made by a third party. Any claimant who wishes to opt out of direct payments to a landlord will have to request that, and an opt-out will not be allowed if the Department considers a claimant to be at risk of accruing arrears of debt.

There are people who are vulnerable. We need to make sure that we have a system that takes account of that and does not expose them to unnecessary risks. That is the sort of thing that is so important to focus on in making universal credit better in Northern Ireland. It is also significant that people in Great Britain are looking at some of the things that we are talking about and saying, "Actually, maybe that is the right direction of travel".

Social Housing

4. Mr Milne asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the implementation of developer contributions to the social housing programme. (AQO 4855/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I remain supportive of introducing a system of developer contributions for affordable housing. Indeed, it is a key action in my housing strategy for Northern Ireland, entitled Facing the Future. I have been critically evaluating the issue over the past few months, and two key factors will impact on the timing of the introduction. The first is that appropriate processes need to be in place to manage any regime efficiently. Secondly, timing is crucial in light of the challenges currently facing the construction sector. In the present market conditions — we have commented already on the fact that the construction sector has exited recession but is still not in the strong position that it might previously have been — it is likely to prove extremely difficult to realise contributions.

My officials, in conjunction with officials from the Department of the Environment, will reassess the matter shortly to examine whether the housing construction market has had the opportunity to improve sufficiently to allow developer contributions to be introduced. I also continue to impress upon the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the housing associations the need to deliver the requirements of the social housing development programme and maximise the opportunity for social housing within the budgets available. That was one of the key points that I stressed in a speech to the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. I heard what he said, and he has partially answered my supplementary question. However, when does he expect developer contributions to social housing to begin?

Mr McCausland: As I indicated, my officials, in conjunction with DOE officials, are about to reassess the whole situation to see what potential there is. It would be wrong for me to prejudge that work before it has even started. However, we feel strongly about it and remain very supportive of it. I therefore look forward to receiving that report from DSD and DOE officials in due course.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. What action has been taken to maximise the opportunity of social housing within the available budget?

Mr McCausland: My officials and I have met chief executives of housing associations on a number of occasions to discuss possible new initiatives to maximise the delivery of social housing. This year, incentives have been introduced to encourage housing associations to undertake advanced land purchases to support the social housing development programme in forthcoming years. I would like to see us in a better place with the housing associations, in that they need to be more ambitious, creative and innovative in the way that they do business. I stressed that point strongly in my contribution to the annual conference of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations last week. It was also picked up by the federation leadership. I think that they realised and agreed very much, in fact they said clearly that the sector needs the opportunity to be innovative and creative.

We have been trying to learn from housing associations in Great Britain, because they have been innovative and creative. I should also say that we have some very good housing associations here, but we just need to get more done and delivered on the ground. We are looking at issues that they have identified that might make it easier for them, such as work around regulations. We are also looking at the obstacles to delivering more social housing on the ground. Are there issues around planning or whatever it is that is possibly holding it up? Are there things that could be done differently by government? That is very much on the agenda at the moment, because we need and want to deliver more.

2.30 pm

Mr Attwood: I will pick up on your last point, Minister. Given the success, as I would describe it, of newbuild housing starts in the time of your predecessors and that there have been fewer newbuild starts in your time, and noting what you said about why that might or might not be

the case, about which you and I might agree or disagree, will you indicate whether the target for 2013-14 newbuild starts in the housing association sector will be reached or, as has happened in the past couple of years, is it, once again, going to fail?

Mr McCausland: We set out in the Programme for Government a target for social and affordable homes, and we will reach that target.

Vacant Property: South Antrim

5. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Social Development how many vacant Northern Ireland Housing Executive houses in South Antrim have been empty for more than eight weeks. (AQO 4856/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised me that the information is not available in the format that the Member requested, as it does not routinely collate information by parliamentary constituency. I have been looking at that recently, because information is more understandable and Members can interrogate it more easily if it is available on a constituency basis rather than on the basis of Housing Executive offices. However, the Housing Executive's local office areas of Antrim, part of Newtownabbey 1 and part of Newtownabbey 2 cover the South Antrim area. Parts of Newtownabbey 1 and Newtownabbey 2 are also in North Belfast. As of 11 October 2013, a total of 132 properties had been vacant for more than eight weeks across the three office areas. Of those properties, only 39 were available to let. That equates to 0.6% of the total Housing Executive housing stock in the three areas. The remaining properties were vacant for reasons such as decanting, undergoing repairs and pending sale or demolition.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive answer. I am sure that, like me, he is distraught at the fact that over 100 houses are not in circulation. Will the Minister tell us what he is doing to try to turn those houses around much quicker?

Mr McCausland: Empty homes are an important issue because when you address that issue, you quite often remove a blight on a particular community. Sometimes they are a cause of or a magnet for antisocial behaviour. You are also bringing a home back into use, so there is a double win with that. Empty homes are a wasted resource, and, as I said, they can attract crime and antisocial behaviour. I am determined to deal with the problem, as I do not think that it received enough attention under some previous Ministers. I outlined my approach in the empty homes strategy and action plan, which was issued on 6 September 2013.

The reasons why houses are left empty are complex. There could be an individual who, for some reason, is unable or unwilling to do anything to bring the house back into use. Some landlords have properties that they cannot bring back into use because they no longer have the resources. It could be that houses are situated in areas where people do not want to live. Therefore, a variety of approaches need to be developed if such empty properties are to be brought back into use.

The Department is working with the Housing Executive to ensure that the empty homes strategy and action plan is implemented. A range of actions are set out in that strategy

and action plan, and I believe that if they are taken forward in that collaborative way, they can really make a difference. There is a role for the Housing Executive, housing associations and local authorities in that. If we get together and address it properly, I think that we can really make a difference. Housing associations, in particular, can play a significant role in facing up to and tackling the challenge of bringing empty homes back into use. It is a gain for everyone, in the sense of removing blight and providing additional accommodation.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister advise the House on the houses that were made vacant by the army in and around Lisburn and Lambeg?

Mr McCausland: The Member is referring to a very particular scheme, although he did not name it. There are a number of areas in Northern Ireland, and particularly in that area, where properties that previously belonged to the army could be brought into social housing. I have had representations on some of those from local elected representatives in that area. I am encouraged by how the work is ongoing. It is an opportunity to provide homes, but we should not simply think of homes in those areas as necessarily being social housing. The Member's party is very committed to the idea of shared housing.

Mr McCarthy: Absolutely.

Mr McCausland: I welcome the Member's endorsement of that point. That is not just "shared" in the sense of religious or political background; it can be "shared" in the sense of mixed tenure. Therefore, in deciding how we take those houses forward, we need to look at whether they match the need in that area. I cannot quote off the top of my head the particular need on the waiting list, but I am happy to look at it, and the Member may have studied it. Is it for four-bed, three-bed, two-bed or single-bed properties? What particular need is there in that area? You need to match housing with the need, and you can then decide on the best way forward. That is a matter to be taken forward by the Housing Executive and the housing associations.

Social Housing: Newtownabbey

6. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive has to address the level of housing stress faced by applicants on the waiting list for social housing in Ballyduff and New Mossley, Newtownabbey. (AQO 4857/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At 31 March 2013, there were 91 applicants in housing stress in Ballyduff. Based on last year's allocations, it is estimated that 41 of those will be accommodated by allocation of existing properties. The housing need projection for 2012-17 is 25 units. A scheme for 30 units by the housing association Oaklee Housing is included in the current year — 2013-14 — of the social housing development programme on the site of the former Ballyduff Primary School.

At 31 March 2013, there were 79 applicants in housing stress in New Mossley. Based on last year's allocations, it is estimated that 35 of those will be accommodated by allocation of existing properties. The housing need projection for 2012-17 is 45 units. A scheme for approximately 20 units by the housing association Connswater Homes is included in the current year of the social housing development programme at Milewater Drive.

I have been told by the Housing Executive that the next social housing development programme should be through by November and on my desk by December. That is good, because in past years, it has been much later. In fact, it has been too late in coming. This year, it is on target to have the information through, and I must commend the Housing Executive senior staff and the chairman. I look forward to seeing the programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There is some interference from a mobile phone, so I ask Members to check that their equipment is not interfering with the broadcast.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answer. It is clear that the need is not being met in Ballyduff and New Mossley. Will the Minister tell us what will be done to address the need?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has indicated a need for 420 new homes across Newtownabbey 1 and Newtownabbey 2 districts. As I indicated earlier, Newtownabbey 1 and Newtownabbey 2 districts are split between the South Antrim and North Belfast constituencies, which makes some of the calculations a bit more difficult. I have had concerns for some time now that sufficient new social housing is not being programmed in all areas across the borough, and that includes the section in South Antrim and that in North Belfast. In recent weeks, I have met the Housing Executive to express those concerns. It tells me that there is a shortage of sites in the area and that housing associations are having difficulty in identifying suitable locations for development. That is clearly not solving the problem. Therefore, I have asked the Housing Executive to introduce an initiative to tackle the issue that will include looking at land in its ownership and at land in adjacent areas that might be suitable for dealing with Newtownabbey need. This is a work in progress, but I expect more schemes to be programmed in the new social housing development programme for 2014-15 to 2016-17. As I have indicated, that is under construction and will come to me for approval in December.

Energy Efficiency

7. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development what work is being undertaken, or is planned, to upgrade single-walled dwellings to make them more energy efficient. (AQO 4858/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question. I have been looking at the issue for some time now, since I became aware that there were some 5,000 Housing Executive properties across Northern Ireland that were of no-fines construction. That means that they are constructed from a type of single-skin concrete wall with no cavity, and therefore have no possible cavity-wall insulation. They tend to be cold homes. In some cases, not only are they thermally inefficient but, depending on the exact nature of the construction, there can be issues around dampness and condensation. It is an issue that has been around for many years. It was not dealt with in the past. It was ignored in previous years and under previous regimes. I am glad to say that the current chair, vice-chair and chief executive of the Housing Executive recognise the need for the issue to be addressed.

It is important that we keep building new homes, but it is also important that we keep the Housing Executive stock

up to standard. I believe that those properties would benefit from a programme of external insulation, and I have asked the Housing Executive to urgently develop such a programme for all houses of no-fines construction, prioritising those properties most in need. The Housing Executive has now set up a working group to progress its strategic approach to thermal performance of all Housing Executive no-fines stock. The group will initially consider the technical solutions available. Once options and costs are made available, the Housing Executive will evaluate the strategic direction regarding those properties.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his response. Minister, you have touched on some of the actions being taken, but I ask that this be treated as a matter of urgency. We have to bear in mind that there are a number of those properties — you say 5,000 — and some are in my constituency of Upper Bann. I ask that priority be given to addressing the issue because a number of those homes have senior citizens living in them. It is costing them a lot of money to heat their homes, and I think it is something, as you said yourself —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has asked his question. It is not an opportunity for a statement.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question. Earlier this year, the Housing Executive completed a pilot scheme on two rural cottages at Bog Road, Coleraine to install external insulation. That will be evaluated over the winter and spring period. The Housing Executive has also initiated two other pilot schemes, at Silverstream in Belfast and Springfarm in Antrim, to consider the impact of external insulation on no-fines properties. The evaluation and outcome of those schemes will inform the Housing Executive's strategy for addressing thermal performance in the rest of its no-fines and rural cottages stock right across Northern Ireland.

I am pleased to say that the Housing Executive was approached by the Building Research Establishment, which is facilitating the latest round of the Technology Strategy Board research and development funding, scaling up retrofit of the nation's homes. It is trying to ascertain the Housing Executive's willingness to participate as a partner. It considers that the Housing Executive's mix of stock and technical challenges would give the proposal a really unique selling proposition. So Northern Ireland, in practice, will become an opportunity to pilot some of the most innovative and best ways of addressing a problem that was ignored for far too many years. As the Member said, people in those homes, many of them older folk, were allowed to remain in those conditions without them being addressed. We are determined to address them.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response so far. Will he also reflect on the fact that it is not just Housing Executive homes that need insulation because of heat loss? I am aware that the Minister visited some homes in the Fountain recently. Will he give careful consideration to a modernisation programme for the owners of private homes in that area?

Mr McCausland: There is a wider issue around regenerating some of those inner-city areas such as the Fountain, around Wapping Lane and the little streets off it. I welcome the Member's interest in that. This is the United Kingdom City of Culture year for Londonderry, and it is a disappointment that we are coming to the end of that year

and that particular part of the city remains as it is and has not been addressed. I share the Member's position on that.

It is a widespread problem, particularly the no-fines issue. It occurs not just in Housing Executive properties, although not so much with housing association properties, because they tend to be newer stock. It is a problem that goes back to the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. I was in a housing estate the other night that is owned not by a housing association but by another body. I talked to the residents there. There are hundreds of homes in that locality owned by a particular group. Again, they are no-fines buildings, which are very cold and difficult to heat. We are making that a focus. I went to the Housing Executive as a local constituency representative about one estate and found that it had been surveying those houses for over 10 years, but that issue had never been identified. That is what struck me; it seems incredible that that was allowed to happen. That is why we have brought a more dynamic and innovative approach into the Housing Executive. That is one of the real positives in the current situation with the Housing Executive. I often am critical of the Housing Executive, and, I think, legitimately so, but, on that occasion, on this issue, we see action being taken at long last. It is a pity that it took so long.

2.45 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Agrifood Sector

1. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an assessment of the potential for the agrifood sector. (AQT 271/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Agrifood is one of our most successful industries, and it is a major driver for success in our rural economy. It is our largest manufacturing industry and achieves sales of over £4 billion. It contributed almost £1 billion of added value to the local economy in 2011. It provides around 10% of all private sector employment, and it is one of only a few sectors in the North that has continued to grow, in spite of the economic downturn.

As Minister, I was delighted that I was able to secure the inclusion of agrifood as a priority sector in the North's economic strategy. The Executive's commitment to developing and implementing a longer-term strategic plan for the sector is part of the Programme for Government. The Agri-Food Strategy Board has identified opportunities for sustainable growth, and it has targeted increased employment in the sector. The board's report, 'Going for Growth' contains a vision for growing a sustainable, profitable and integrated agrifood supply chain that is focused on delivering the needs of the market. I am pleased that the report recognises the requirement for all parts of the supply chain to be sustainable and profitable. I believe that that is something that we could all aspire to for the industry.

'Going for Growth' has set challenging targets for the agrifood sector to achieve by 2020. There are targets to

create 15,000 new jobs, to grow sales by 60% to £7 billion, to increase sales to outside the North to £4.5 billion and to increase value added to £1 billion. There is a lot of work to do to meet the challenging targets that have been set by the industry in 'Going for Growth'. The industry has played a key role in developing the plan and will do so in its delivery.

As I said, the industry has had a key role to play in developing the plan, and it will take forward a lot of its delivery aspects. I understand that the board is reconvening the sectoral subgroups to agree the way forward on the industry-led recommendations. From a government perspective, I will continue to work closely with my Executive colleagues to help support the industry's plans for expansion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Again, I remind Members that when asking topical questions, they should avoid questions that are listed for oral answer.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. I know that the Minister has said that there is lots to be done and I know that she has brought this to Executive colleagues. What can be done in the meantime to move this along?

Mrs O'Neill: It is absolutely not the case that we are waiting. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I have a piece of work to do in coordinating the response from all the Departments, because there are a number of key asks of various Departments. The piece of work that we are involved with is bringing to the Executive a paper that charts out what each Department is going to do and deliver in the time ahead. However, we are not waiting until that piece of work is done. We have already made a number of announcements. One of the key asks in the document was around access to finance for industry. I am delighted that the agrifood loan scheme has been announced. It will help farmers and producers who are involved in the integrated supply chains to be able to access finance.

One other key ask was around eradicating TB. I have announced my intention to establish the new Government/industry strategic partnership that is going to develop a long-term strategy to eradicate TB. The other area that we are already moving on relates to developing the new rural development programme, because I have always said that that is going to be a significant tool in the Department being able to deliver on the asks in the 'Going for Growth' recommendations.

So, a lot of work is ongoing. I recently returned from a trip to China where, again, we were out engaging with new markets and trying to get our local produce into those new markets. A lot of work is ongoing, but I look forward to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and me bringing the paper to the Executive in the near future, where we will, hopefully, secure agreement on the way forward across all Departments.

Rivers Agency

2. Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made following her announcement on 16 May that Rivers Agency headquarters would move to Cookstown. (AQT 272/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes; absolutely. The Member will be aware that I am very committed to ensuring that we decentralise and distribute public sector jobs fairly. I am sure that he welcomes the fact that approximately 60 jobs in the Rivers Agency are going to the mid-Ulster area. That location was chosen for many reasons, not least its central location. The Rivers Agency, as an emergency responder, needs to be able to reach many areas of the North very speedily. We are making progress. My intention is that we will be on site by 2015. A lot of work has been done at the Loughry site, which the Department owns, where we would site the new building or use existing buildings. The work is ongoing, but the target for 2015 is live and real.

Mr I McCrea: I agree with the Minister that Cookstown is a prime location for the site, but does the Minister accept that, when people hear statements, whether it is about the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) headquarters or the Rivers Agency headquarters moving out of Belfast, they would like to see progress as quickly as possible? Can the Minister assure me and colleagues from other constituencies that this is progressing as quickly as possible?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, I am fully committed to making sure that that happens and that there is a fair distribution of public sector jobs. I am committed to the move of the Rivers Agency to Cookstown, fisheries to Down, forestry to Fermanagh, and the new headquarters to the north-west. A lot of work is going on. I am keeping the pressure on officials to make sure that they are delivering. There is a lot of work to do. This cannot be turned around overnight, but I assure the Member that progress is being made and we are working to meet the 2015 target.

Broadband: Rural Areas

3. Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing about the problem of rural broadband, as I am sure she is acutely aware of the frustrations being felt across many areas of Northern Ireland, including the Sperrins, the Mourne and the glens. (AQT 273/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I share those concerns. This is a subject that I have repeatedly talked about in the House. I come from a rural area, so I absolutely understand the difficulties that are posed. I decided that I would try to sort out the problem. It is obviously the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) responsibility. That said, if I am asking farmers in rural communities to apply for things online, it is only appropriate that I should try to solve the problem that obviously exists. I have done that in a number of ways. First, I have been encouraging farmers who do not have access to broadband, or even computers, to use the DARD Direct offices, which are open and available for them. Secondly, in respect of financial investment, I have done some work with DETI and I am putting £5 million into its project to target areas that are actually "not spots".

I believe that one of the problems in the past has been that DARD funds have not necessarily gone to areas of need. On this occasion, I have made sure that I have identified areas based on deprivation statistics where I believe that the £5 million of funding that I am making available should be targeted.

Mr McKinney: Are clear and realisable targets being put in place to achieve 100% satisfactory coverage?

Mrs O'Neill: The DETI contract, which I am now involved with, clearly sets out that, by 2015, something like 98-9% of people will be covered. I am working to that. The reason why I have prioritised certain areas is based on deprivation statistics. Let us try to get a service into those areas as quickly as possible. DETI went out to tender for the scheme, and I believe that that has been signed off. Work is to start immediately. I have identified the areas where I feel funding should be directed, so I would like to see progress being made almost immediately.

Reconciliation: Rural Areas

4. Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she believes is advancing reconciliation in rural areas, given that she recently approved funding for faith-based groups, which is a good thing. (AQT 274/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In my view, reconciliation is one of the biggest challenges facing every one of us. Across some rural and urban areas, good progress is being made, but much more needs to be done to tackle major issues such as segregation. That applies equally to rural and urban settings. In my opinion, in terms of the past, it may well be that the best that we can do is agree to disagree — in other words, accept that there are different narratives.

Our focus should primarily be on the future, which should be the objective of any actions in moving forward. I welcome ideas on how my Department can assist in taking it forward, particularly in rural areas.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire le haghaidh an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Will she elaborate on practical steps that could be taken to advance that?

Mrs O'Neill: One of the obvious key elements of reconciliation is dialogue. We need to increase the number of conversations, particularly the difficult ones that need to happen. As I said, we clearly have different narratives of our past, and we will have to agree to disagree on that. However, the past cannot be allowed to hold us back in the future. We need to deliver for the people who elect us.

As everybody knows, reconciliation will be a long process. However, good work has already been done, and we need to build on that. We need to build on it and do a lot more. If my Department can play a role in assisting with that, I am very much up for that. As I said, I would really welcome any ideas that people might have on how I can best direct funds and supports from my Department to take that forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Michaela Boyle is not in her place, I call Jo-Anne Dobson.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea/Johne's Disease

6. Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to inform the House when and why the decision was taken for Animal Health and Welfare NI, rather than the Department's veterinary service, to take forward the bovine viral diarrhoea and Johne's disease schemes. (AQT 276/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Bovine viral diarrhoea and Johne's disease are being taken forward by the Animal Health and Welfare group. I am not sure whether the Member has

concerns about it, but it is excellent work that was taken forward with John Thompson in the lead role. The group was established alongside a similar group in the South, because the key aim is to get free movement of cattle across the island. We have an all-island animal health and welfare strategy in place. The vehicle for its delivery will be EU animal health law, and we are actively working towards that.

The Animal Health and Welfare group has done very positive work, which it will continue in the time ahead. The farming community has welcomed the work. The group is tackling a production disease. It is not waiting until something is sick; it is tackling this head-on, so it will improve the competitiveness of the farming industry in the time ahead.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. It is unusual for her Department not to want to take on additional staff and responsibilities. Is this a new trend for her Department of engaging the private sector? Will she inform the House of the procurement procedures that she will use in future schemes?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I am not a control freak. If somebody else can do it better, I am quite open to their coming forward and suggesting that. In this instance, I have said that that group is best placed to take it forward. It is similar to the group that has been formed in the South, and it is all about the free movement of cattle across the island. It is welcomed by the farming community and is tackling production diseases head-on. It is very positive. However, as I said, if groups out there can provide services that need to be provided, I welcome that. I am a big supporter of the group, which is why I made a financial contribution to get it started on its work. We also have industry contribution, so it is a win-win for everybody.

Farming: Female Participation

7. Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what specific measures she has adopted to assist women to remain within the farming industry. (AQT 277/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: That is a good question. Given the average age of those in the farming community, we have been involved in a lot of work on succession planning. We talk to families about their plans for the future, and, on every occasion, that involves mothers, sisters and others in the house. I am very much involved in taking that work forward.

Through axis 3 and rural development funding, a lot of rural businesswomen have been able to bid into the programme and have had success with their projects. I also attend a number of Rural Women's Network events so that we can talk to rural women about their needs and then shape the supports from the Department. Quite a number of wide-ranging initiatives have been taken forward. I am happy to provide more detail of those to the Member if I have not covered all of them in this answer.

Mrs D Kelly: I would be grateful to the Minister if she would provide me with more detail on the specific measures. I will widen the issue out: what analysis has the Department made of the impact of rural poverty on women and of whether it is detrimental to them in going into the farming industry?

3.00 pm

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is aware from her time on the Committee that I have taken forward a £16 million package for tackling poverty and isolation. Quite a lot of work was done on how we should target those most in need, including women. Women were a part of all that analysis. We took forward some fantastic projects. I know that £16 million does not sound like a lot in the scheme of things, but it was leverage funding. We were able to put forward money that attracted other Departments to match fund or do projects that they would not necessarily have done in the absence of the £16 million of funding. Lots of positive work was done.

I know that the Member has an interest in childcare. With the Bright Start initiative that was announced last week, there are specific rural measures on childcare that I am committed to taking forward. There are three in total, covering the social economy, childcare enterprises, creating additional places and practical physical support. Lots of positive work relating to rural women is being taken forward by the Department.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is the end of the period of topical questions. We move to oral questions that have been listed for the Minister to answer. Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Larch Tree Disease

1. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to deal with the threat of larch tree disease. (AQO 4866/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The disease, whose scientific name is phytophthora ramorum — I will call it P ramorum for the rest of these answers — is a serious threat to over 100 species of plants, including our native ash trees and bilberry. In 2010, we discovered that the Japanese larch produces infective spores in large quantities in the crown of the tree. Our strategy has been to fell infected larch trees and apparently healthy trees around infected sites, because the disease may be present but not showing symptoms and because infected larch forests have the capacity to spread the disease widely.

Since the first diagnosis of P ramorum in larch in August 2010, over 600 hectares of woodland have been felled. Despite that, recent surveys found that the disease is continuing to spread within areas infected in previous years on the Antrim plateau and in County Down and south Armagh. We also found new scattered infections in Tyrone and Fermanagh, and Forest Service plans to clear an additional 360 hectares as soon as possible. Once the disease is well established in the woodland environment, it is impossible to eradicate. That is the case in south-west Scotland and parts of Wales, and we are close to that point in the North of Ireland. Therefore, I have instructed officials to re-evaluate our policy options to contain the disease in the North, protect the most vulnerable areas and promote forest recovery. We are setting priorities for forests where the disease appears to be localised, where there are important botanical collections and where natural environment sites would benefit from felling trees.

We are working closely with the forestry industry to get the work done in an orderly manner as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, visitors are welcome to our forests and they remain open, but I stress the importance of following the biosecurity guidance to everyone who uses Forest Service land.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for her detailed response. Clearly, this is of major concern. Has the Department been in communication with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in London regarding the matter? What procedures is it putting in place to meet the threat of the disease, given the extent of the problem, which the Minister has reflected on?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, my priority is what happens here, but, of course, I engage with DEFRA and with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in the South. We have an all-Ireland strategy for plant health in place, and we engage it when it comes to tree diseases. We obviously have conversations with DEFRA on an ongoing basis on many issues, and this is certainly one of those, given that the disease has spread across Ireland, Britain and Europe. It is across the board. We have ongoing discussions, and, in particular, we try to learn from one another in science. A lot of great work is being done in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), our science institute. We also look to see what other areas do and make sure that we assist one another in tackling such diseases, which see us felling large amounts of timber across the North. That is not something that anyone wants to see.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister. Could she outline what actions she is taking with her Southern counterparts to tackle the disease?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, we have an all-island plant health strategy in place, which means that we work collectively across the island. It gives us tremendous benefits, and we can use a fortress Ireland approach when we have disease. Obviously, anything that happens in Donegal's forests will have an impact on Derry's forests. It makes sense that we cooperate, and, as I said in my previous answer, we cooperate with DEFRA and DAFM. When it comes to particular action with the South, the forest services North and South exchange information about the disease on a regular basis. They met as recently as mid-October, but they meet at least once a month to discuss tackling plant disease.

I am re-evaluating our policy options to take into account the extent to which we can contain the disease and protect ourselves. AFBI, which is the science institute, is collaborating on the P ramorum project with the Council for Forest Research and Development, which partners with CHASAC and universities in Limerick and Dublin. In addition, the North/South Ministerial Council discusses the topic regularly, and it has been tabled for further discussion at the next sectoral meeting.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her response to what is a very serious issue. Will she assure us that the many criticisms of her Department's handling of the Chalara infections have been rectified and will not be repeated in the fight against this disease?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member may be referring to the recent Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development inquiry

into Chalara, but I welcomed that as a constructive debate and engagement on what else we can do.

The approach to tackling larch tree disease has been one of containment and eradication. We have taken that right down to site levels to try to isolate outbreaks of the disease and make sure that it does not spread any further. Despite the surveillance and the management, we have seen a recent expansion of the disease, which indicates that it is becoming a bit more established in the wider woodland. As I said, I have asked officials to look at the policy again and make sure that we do everything that is practically possible. We have put more resources into the forestry section to enable it to deal with all this. That is something that the Committee had called for. A lot of positive work is going on, but this disease is spreading. In the first instance, we have to look at eradication and containment, but, as things move on, we have to step back and look at our policy again, which is what I am involved in doing at the moment.

Going for Growth

2. Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what level of funds has been made available to support the Going for Growth agrifood strategy. (AQO 4867/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: 'Going for Growth' was developed by the Agri-Food Strategy Board as part of the Executive's Programme for Government. The industry, through the board, has identified opportunities for sustainable growth and targeted increased employment in these sectors. This is something that we all hope for. 'Going for Growth' is being considered by Departments, agencies and the board to identify the best way to take forward its numerous and wide-ranging recommendations.

The recommendations made by the board are directed at government and at industry. The investment that the board has identified from both is significant. From a government perspective, Departments are exploring the various mechanisms that could provide funding to support sustainable growth in the sector, including the new rural development programme and the European regional development fund as well as Invest NI's selective financial assistance programme. In the current economic climate, the implementation of some of the recommendations will be very challenging for the Executive. We will need to look carefully at the resource implications of all the proposals.

The recently announced agrifood loan scheme will help producers involved in integrated supply chains to access the finance that they need in order to expand production in a sustainable way. Access to finance was one of the key areas that was highlighted in 'Going for Growth', and this will help to provide a solution to that key challenge. As I said, we plan to seek Executive endorsement of the proposed way forward in response to the board's report in the very near future.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her response. Although she and her Department may claim that good progress is being made on the plans for the implementation of a range of recommendations, until DARD and DETI decide on the final finances required as well as where they will come from — including the agrifood loan scheme, which will be small in comparison — will she tell us whether the successful implementation of the strategic action plan

is entirely dependent on the £400 million as previously stated?

Mrs O'Neill: I previously said to the House that, although I accept that these are challenging targets, I believe that they are doable. I say that because even before the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I took a report and an action plan to the Executive, we delivered on some of the key asks, particularly on access to finance, because that was one of the key asks in the document. Businesses are constantly saying to us that they cannot get access to finance. The agrifood loan scheme was progressing that, even in the absence of having gone to the Executive yet. I know that that is very much welcomed by the industry. It is particularly targeted at the poultry sector at the moment. However, in the future it will be targeted at other sectors, moving into the dairy sector, the meat sector and the pork sector over the next number of months. That is very positive.

As I said, we also have the TB strategy that I have launched. That is taking a strategic look at TB, which has a major impact on our farming practices here. So, that is all very positive work being done even outside of the work going to the Executive.

The other area is the rural development programme. I have used the report from the Agri-Food Strategy Board to shape the proposals from the rural development programme that are going out for consultation. That is all very positive work that is ongoing even before we go to the Executive with the other proposals that we have asked for.

There is great work going on. I was at an industry event last week, and the industry is very positive about what the Executive are doing with agrifood. It is very positive that it is in the Programme for Government and that the Executive are responding to its needs. Great work is being done. Is there a lot more to do? Absolutely. Is it challenging? Absolutely. Is it doable? Absolutely.

Mr Frew: Of course, we know that the Departments are assessing the Agri-Food Strategy Board's report at the present time. We also see some of the recommendations seeping out into the psyche of Departments. Of the over 100 recommendations, are there any that the Minister now knows she will not implement and does not support?

Mrs O'Neill: No. I have kept a very open mind, and we have asked Departments to approach it in that way. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I will meet over the next number of weeks, I think, to home in on where we can bring forward the implementation plan.

Nothing jumps out to me as an absolute non-runner at this stage. However, as I said, as part of the rural development consultation, we have asked people to be mindful of the 'Going for Growth' document. We have shaped it in a way that gives us that feedback. Will we be able to provide everything? Will industry provide everything? That will be the question further down the line, but, if we go into it with a positive frame of mind and a positive attitude, we will come out with a whole lot more.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers on this question so far. Given that finance will be required to implement 'Going for Growth' as part of the Agri-Food Strategy Board's report, what discussions has the Department had with the banks, and how successful

or otherwise have those discussions been? It will be important that banking finance is available to farming.

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in previous answers, we have launched the agrifood loan scheme. That was the result of correspondence between DETI and the banks. It signed memorandums of understanding with all the major banks, which will now have a real focus. There will be Executive backing of about 40% of the finance. That will make a real difference to those who are asking banks for funding.

From his role on the Committee, the Member will be aware that one of the big issues that is faced by anybody who has vision and wants to do something is getting access to finance. The agrifood loan scheme has been rolled out. It is targeted at poultry, but, I think, by December or early January, it will be available to the pork sector and will then move on to meat and dairy in the future. It is about looking after all the sectors. We identified a major problem, and the Executive have responded to that problem and told the industry how they are prepared to help it. It is about putting that physical capital there and having those negotiations with the banks.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

4. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on compliance with the welfare of laying hens directive(1999/74/EC), which came into force in January 2012. (AQO 4869/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: European Council directive 1999/74/EC was adopted in 1999 and lays down minimum welfare standards for the protection of laying hens. The directive was transposed into domestic legislation here by the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012. Since 1 January 2012, it has been illegal to keep laying hens in conventional or battery cages. I am pleased to report that all our producers are compliant with the directive. I acknowledge the commitment that our egg industry has shown. Many of our producers made big investments in converting to other production systems. That demonstrated their commitment to animal welfare and the reputation of the egg industry here.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am not surprised that our producers complied; that is the type of people they are. The question was, perhaps, more directed at the Europe-wide reaction. I wonder whether you remember the debate back in 2012, Minister, when some doubt was cast on other countries' ability to comply with the directive. Can you confirm whether we are now importing eggs into this country that are being illegally produced in other countries?

3.15 pm

Mrs O'Neill: I confirm that Germany and Italy are the two member states that are still not compliant. There were 11 others, but, when legal action was taken against them, they very quickly became compliant. Obviously, there is free movement of table eggs, so we cannot stop the movement in. However, in the past six months, inspectors have not encountered any consignments from the two member states that are non-compliant.

When we encountered eggs coming from such places in the past, urgent details of those consignments were

checked against the member states' lists. If you remember, member states had to produce lists of who was compliant and who was not. So, our people were able to check whether the eggs came from a compliant or non-compliant producer, and we were then able to say that they would not be marketed as class A eggs. We were able to put some control on that.

The key issue is egg product coming in, and we debated how to stop or at least to hinder eggs coming in from Germany or Italy in products that could be anything from lasagne to powdered products. The Department has been making sure that we also identify products and refer them back. So, we are focusing not just on the eggs but on the egg product.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. Mr Lunn, the debate was in December 2011, and it was an Ulster Unionist motion. One of the concerns raised at that stage was that, when our producers were doing away with their cages, those cages were going to other European countries for use there. Has the Minister any evidence that that has happened, or has she taken any steps with her European counterparts to regulate it so that any eggs produced are produced to the European standard?

Mrs O'Neill: The countries that were not compliant at that stage and may have wanted those cages are now compliant, apart from the two countries that I set out. They may have thought that they could do that and continue with the current practice, but the threat of infraction from Europe made a difference. I think that that was because all member states were very concerned about the impact that it would have on them if those people were allowed to continue to trade. The pressure has been applied, and we have had success with the 11 countries all now coming on board. However, we need to keep the pressure on Italy and Germany to make sure that they are also compliant, and I know that court cases are ongoing there because of that.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for her answer. I was tempted to ask her which comes first — the chicken or the egg — but I do not think that I will give in to that temptation. What specific measures can she take to lessen the impact of the measure on the industry here?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, our industry was keen to make sure that it maintained its high reputation for producing and for doing so to the highest welfare standards. I very much commend them for that. Egg producers, like any other producers, are able to come forward to the Department for the range of supports that are available, including the processing and marketing grant scheme. Quite a range of supports are also available to egg producers. That is open to them, and I know that a number have availed themselves of it. My job was to make sure that we kept putting pressure on the EU to make sure that it stops and to rule out anybody trading when they are not compliant. We have successfully done that to a certain extent, although we have a wee bit to go with the other two countries. However, we are on the road to making sure that we are not disadvantaged in any shape or form because two countries have decided that they will ignore the directive.

Fishermen: Carlingford

5. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance is available to fishermen in the Carlingford area who may be impacted by the construction of the Narrow Water Bridge. (AQO 4870/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The European Fisheries Fund remains open for applications under measure 1.3 for financial assistance towards investments on board fishing vessels, which includes support towards the cost of modifying vessels to aid navigational safety. No applications for such support have been received to date, but my officials would be happy to discuss the support that could be provided under measure 1.3 of the European Fisheries Fund.

I am aware that there have been talks between fishermen and the project promoters on the impact that the development would have on the established mussel fishery. I believe that a number of mitigation measures were agreed to address the concerns of those who may be affected by the construction. That was done to everybody's satisfaction.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her reply. Is she confirming that money is potentially available for operational costs?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, that is what I am confirming. A number of measures under the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) can help vessels to reduce fuel costs and generally become more efficient. The EFF does not allow for new fishing vessels but for other measures that improve efficiency, including new propellers, providing that the improvements do not increase the vessels' ability to increase their catch. However, those other measures are eligible for funding.

A grant is also available for putting a new engine into a vessel. If there are people who the Member thinks could avail themselves of that scheme, I encourage them to contact DARD and make sure that they use that assistance that is there for them.

Ash Dieback

6. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her Department's efforts to tackle ash dieback disease. (AQO 4871/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The recent announcement of an outbreak of Chalara ash dieback in hedgerow ash trees in County Leitrim is regrettable but not unexpected. Experience in Britain and the rest of Europe tells us that the disease often spreads from recently planted trees to older trees by the release of spores from infected leaves that have fallen to the ground. In line with our joint all-Ireland Chalara control strategy, officials in the Forest Service of the DAFM have kept counterparts in DARD and Forest Service aware of the situation and how they plan to eradicate the outbreak.

Our surveillance in the wider countryside closest to the outbreak in the South has been increased but has not yet found signs of disease in native older trees and hedgerows. Elsewhere, we inspected older trees close to young plantations that have already been destroyed as part of the control programme. That has meant a significant amount of work. By 16 October, inspectors had

visited 1,066 sites and found 10 new cases of Chalara infection. Together with the cases found during 2012, 87 young plantations, planted since 2006, were declared infected and 70,000 associated young planted trees and leaf debris destroyed.

The outlook is not optimistic. Once the disease begins to circulate in the wider environment, as has been the case in County Leitrim, control becomes difficult. Nevertheless, while the disease is limited to only one or a few sites, eradication has to be tried, and I am sure that we in the House wish our colleagues in the South well as they try to control a disease that affects every one of us on the island of Ireland.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Are mature ash trees destroyed if found to be infected with ash dieback?

Mrs O'Neill: That is hypothetical at this stage, given that DARD surveillance has not revealed disease spread from young ash trees to older trees and hedgerows. That said, our surveillance includes inspection of older trees in the vicinity of young plantations infected by Chalara ash dieback that have already been destroyed. Surveillance in the wider countryside closest to the outbreak in the South has been increased.

Our response to any disease findings is subject to the all-Ireland Chalara control strategy, which is to contain and eradicate the disease and to minimise the risk of it spreading and becoming established. The strategy also states that it will be adaptable to changing circumstances and be kept under constant review based on ongoing surveillance and the development of scientific knowledge of this complex disease. It is key that we can adapt our policy as a result of any new findings or new science. It is important that we can adapt our policy as and when required.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for her answers. What resources have been targeted at tackling the disease?

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service has been very much in the lead. It has done fantastic work and been busy, particularly when you hear the number of sites that its staff visited and the testing that it has done.

I look to the Department and at what else we can do to tackle recent tree diseases. We are dealing with ash dieback, P ramorum and a range of diseases prevalent on Forest Service land. So, DARD availed itself of additional resources in Forest Service, because obviously it has the specialist skills and necessary machinery available. Also, based on experience in Forest Service, the permanent secretary and I have decided to allocate responsibility for all plant health matters to its chief executive. That will ensure that the policy implementation is led by a senior civil servant with the appropriate professional qualification.

Recognising that the threat of plant disease and pests appears to be increasing, the Department has also indicated that it intends to increase the scale of resources devoted to plant health. That may well mean prioritising within Forest Service the areas of work that people are involved with.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answers. A number of landowners in my constituency of North Antrim have planted ash using Department grants but have had to cut back and remove all the trees when ash dieback was found. Is there any grant aid available from the Department to replant those areas?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. You may remember that, back in June, I announced grant support for any woodland owners that are affected. Basically, if you have had to remove trees, we have grant support that will help you to replant with alternative species. Obviously, we want to continue to plant trees. This is something that will scare landowners, and they will be very careful about what they plant in the future. So, we have announced grant support that will encourage replanting with species that are less susceptible to these types of disease.

Dairy Industry

7. Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to ensure a viable and sustainable dairy milk industry, given that milk quotas are being abolished in 2015. (AQO 4872/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The dairy sector makes a very important contribution to the local agrifood industry. To ensure its future sustainability when milk quotas end in 2015, it is vital that it remains competitive.

My Department aims to help the dairy sector improve its performance and grow its potential in the marketplace in a sustainable way. That has included joint support with Invest NI for an industry-led dairy competitiveness study, which was aimed at helping the sector to plan for the future, post milk quotas. The recommendations of that study are being taken forward by the dairy industry.

A market-led strategy is vital for the dairy sector, because when milk quotas end there will be no restraints on production. As a consequence, future decisions on milk production will be taken by the dairy sector in the context of input costs and market returns.

To help ensure that the industry remains sustainable, my Department will continue to provide education, training, technical support and research to help improve efficiency, competitiveness and innovation. In addition, we are consulting on proposals for a range of measures to support the sustainable development of the local agrifood industry, including the dairy sector, under the 2014-2020 rural development programme.

The dairy sector has the potential to grow further in a sustainable way, particularly following the ending of milk quotas, and to exploit opportunities arising from the predicted world population expansion.

As I said, the Agri-Food Strategy Board's report 'Going for Growth' has set challenging growth targets for the local agrifood industry and recognises the need for all parts of the supply chain to be sustainable and profitable. The recommendations in the report are being considered, and I hope to bring forward proposals to the Executive in the very near future.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be well aware of the hands-on approach of Minister Coveney, her counterpart in the South of Ireland, to

strategic issues such as this. What discussions, if any, has the Minister had with Minister Coveney on an all-Ireland marketing approach to the dairy industry and to milk produced in the North of Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Marketing across the world, not just in the dairy sector but all sectors, is something that we regularly discuss at North/South Ministerial Council meetings and discussions outside of that. The dairy sector for us is hugely important, given that it accounts for something like 32% of our entire agricultural output. It also provides employment on 3,500 farms, has 2,200 people involved in processing and produces £850 million in sales. That is an industry that we need to protect.

I do not know what else the Member is looking for, but I outlined in my answer to her substantive question the work that we have done, particularly around the competitiveness study. That is what the dairy industry asked for, and that is what I provided. We have also done a lot of work around the EU milk package and making sure that it is relevant to our local industry. Post milk quotas, that is the issue that is going to provide a challenge to the industry, but the industry has been very aware that this has been coming for quite a long time. It is something that the industry has been planning for post 2015.

We have seen expansion in our dairy sector since 1995. That will continue. Quotas are not necessarily the dictator of prices. They were introduced quite a number of years ago to prevent Europe having to pay excessive funds for intervention.

I do not believe that that is needed any more. When we look to the future, we need to plan for targeted growth. We have very real targets for the dairy sector. You can see that in the agrifood strategy report. That is as hands on as I can be in working with the dairy sector and ensuring that we meet challenges. We have brought forward that major piece of work in the Agri-Food Strategy Board to the Executive. That is all very positive. It is a work in progress in the time ahead.

3.30 pm

I do not believe that we need to compete with the South. We should be very focused on export-led growth, which is at the core of the 'Going for Growth' document. Our focus should be very much on that and marketing what we have, which is a very strong brand image — a clean, green image — of what we produce here. That is the strength that we must build on. We do not need to fight about where milk is going. We must work together, brand and market and get into those markets that we are trying to reach, particularly given the population rise —

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

Executive Committee Business

Energy Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Energy Bill dealing with power sector decarbonisation, as contained in Part 1 of the Energy Bill, as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Lords.

We are here today to consider the issue of extending primary legislative powers to Northern Ireland to set a power sector decarbonisation target in 2016. I believe that those measures will ensure that Northern Ireland remains a leading destination for investment in low-carbon electricity. The consent of the Assembly has been sought for provisions relating to matters that are devolved to Northern Ireland. The provisions that are under consideration relate to the establishment of a paving power to enable a decarbonisation target range for the power sector to be set through UK-wide secondary legislation.

The setting of the decarbonisation target is in response to a recommendation by the Committee on Climate Change and will provide a consistent investment signal for renewable generators across the United Kingdom that renewable generation is needed as part of the long-term energy mix. The aim of setting a power sector decarbonisation target is to reduce the carbon intensity of the electricity-generation sector. The costs of reducing carbon intensity in the power sector are generally lower than doing so in other sectors. A decision to exercise that power will be taken only when the fifth carbon budget has been set in law, which is due to take place in 2016.

Taking a power in primary legislation and setting the level of the target in secondary legislation allows for the target to be reviewed and amended, thereby ensuring that additional costs are not imposed on the economy in order to meet the target range. That helps to ensure that a target range is set at the right level to encourage investment in low-carbon technologies without adding unnecessary costs to the economy to achieve that. If a target were incorporated directly into primary legislation, it would offer much less flexibility to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

If and when the power is exercised to set a decarbonisation target range, there is a requirement for the UK Government to consult devolved Ministers and, in the case of Northern Ireland, to take into account the unique circumstances of the single electricity market. Extending that power to Northern Ireland will allow us to contribute to a wider non-aggregated UK-wide target without placing any specific responsibility on Northern Ireland. The absence of a target in Northern Ireland would mean that renewable investors here will lack the same clarity that GB investors will have and could result in Northern Ireland's renewable investment being negatively impacted. Diverging from a UK-wide position on a power sector decarbonisation target may also impact on our ability to meet the 2020 renewable electricity target. If the power is not taken now, it could have a significant impact on rates of investment in low-carbon generation.

I am confident that by supporting a power sector decarbonisation target, there will be positive opportunities for Northern Ireland to further reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels, cut carbon emissions, promote investment and support job creation. The Executive are in agreement with that course of action. Passing the legislative consent motion is an important step in decarbonising our electricity supply in the longer term.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for her statement.

At its meeting on 20 June, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment considered correspondence from the Minister informing the Committee that a legislative consent motion would be required for provisions of the Energy Bill that deal with power sector decarbonisation. The Minister highlighted the view of industry and investors that a target is needed as a clear and unambiguous signal to encourage more renewable generation. She further highlighted that not having a long-term commitment to decarbonisation fails to set a clear vision for our future energy mix, could create uncertainty for investors, and could adversely impact supply-chain investment and the development of projects to come online after 2020.

Having considered the evidence, the Committee agreed to support the setting of a 2030 decarbonisation target for the power sector, and further agreed to support the Department in seeking to extend to Northern Ireland a power sector decarbonisation target through the legislative consent motion. Those are the views of the Committee.

Mr Dunne: I, too, support the legislative consent motion. I think that it is important because it will provide investors in the renewable energy industry with a level of certainty beyond the much talked about 2020 renewables target date. The absence of a realistic yet ambitious target in Northern Ireland beyond 2020 would leave us trailing behind mainland GB. Committing to a 2030 decarbonisation target will also help us to work towards and achieve our 2020 renewable targets. It is important that we have stability and certainty in the sector and, in supporting this motion today, we will take a step forward in that direction. I welcome the motion, and I am happy to commend it to the House.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted to speak on this very exciting legislative consent motion, which hands the power to set targets for the decarbonisation of the electricity generation sector to the British Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Under the proposal, which has received the endorsement of the Executive and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the devolved Government, which have responsibility for setting energy policy, will have a role as a consultee in setting any future statutory decarbonisation target, but the sole responsibility for achieving that target will be placed on the British Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

We have been told that the provisions are being made to provide certainty to potential investors, because it is believed that the absence of a target here would mean that renewable investors would not have the same certainty as British investors. I do not question the need for a target to provide people with certainty, but I would like to hear from

the Minister why it has not been included as part of our own forthcoming energy Bill and why we are leaving it up to the British Parliament to dictate what target we set. We still do not really know what they are going to do because it is still going through the legislative process. Perhaps the Minister could respond to that.

We need a statutory target as a very clear and unambiguous signal to encourage more renewable generation in the long term. When the Committee discussed the issue, it agreed to support the setting of a 2030 decarbonisation target for the power sector, and I suppose that that is what we all want to commit to. The Assembly has previously called on the Minister to bring forward a long-term plan to move towards a low-carbon future and the decarbonisation of electricity generation. That must remain a priority, regardless of what targets are in place.

The potential resources on this island for low-carbon and renewable electricity generation are second to none. Our potential resources are much greater than those in Scotland, but it appears that Scotland is an awful lot further down the road towards self-sufficiency from renewable electricity. We could do so much more with the sustainable resources we have if only we could tap into them. We do not need to wait for the British Government to set a statutory target to decarbonise our electricity generation sector. We can do that without the need for the British Government to set a target, but there must be a collective will in the Assembly and the Executive to do so.

My big fear is that allowing the British Government to set a target for a decarbonisation date will allow the Executive and Ministers here to say that it is not their target, and they do not have any responsibility for implementing it, which allows them to wash their hands of it. I want a clear commitment from the Minister that, even though the Executive and her Department will be consultees only on the setting of the target, she will continue to have a hands-on approach to delivering the decarbonisation of electricity generation here.

The issue of ownership and responsibility for delivering the targets is a big concern, but regardless of who sets what target for the decarbonisation of the power sector, we should push ahead in encouraging, facilitating and delivering more renewable sources of electricity well in advance of 2030. We need to do that constantly, and through some of the Executive's and Minister's policies, we are greatly increasing the amount and proportion of our electricity that comes from renewable sources, which is welcome.

I firmly believe that we can meet our electricity needs from renewable sources on this island. We need to do that; it is in everyone's best interests. Implementing the target would contribute to our wider climate change agenda. Some people do not think that that exists, but it is clearly stated in this legislative document that we will all, hopefully, endorse.

The decarbonisation of our electricity generation sector would have a significant downward impact on electricity and energy prices, provided generators are paid and incentivised fairly and in a way that delivers low, predictable and transparent prices for all consumers. Decarbonising our electricity generation is a much simpler process than trying to decarbonise heat — the Minister has started that process — or decarbonising transport,

which we have not made much progress on. We need to start with the decarbonisation of electricity and put much of the emphasis on that. I do not really care who sets the target or where it comes from; the important thing is that we decarbonise our electricity generation, and hopefully we can do it by 2030.

Mrs Foster: I thank those who contributed to the debate. I particularly thank my Executive colleagues from right across the House who endorsed the legislative consent motion; the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and the Business Committee for the way in which it considered the matter in a timely manner to allow the debate to take place today.

Mr Flanagan asked why the matter is not in our Energy Bill. The answer is very simple: the aim is to have a UK-wide target set after the fifth carbon budget, which is set by Westminster. That carbon budget will be set in 2016. The target will not be set in primary legislation but in secondary legislation to give flexibility. That flexibility is important because we are trying to send out a strong message to investors but, at the same time, keep that flexibility to deal with what is happening in the economy at that time. We are trying to make sure that it does not cost the consumer anything, and I am sure that Mr Flanagan will support that.

A UK-wide target is also more beneficial to us than a Northern Ireland target because it places no direct responsibility on us and costs less to Northern Ireland consumers. I presume that Mr Flanagan does not want to cost Northern Ireland consumers any more money than is necessary. It is also an integral part of the electricity market reform on feed-in tariffs with contracts for difference, which again is legislated for on a UK-wide level.

Given all the circumstances, including the fact that the UK has to report to Europe on its commitments in the European Union, it is eminently sensible for us to buy into the UK-wide target, which is what the legislative consent motion intends to do. It reinforces our commitment to sustainable and affordable low-carbon generation and will highlight the priority that the Executive and the Assembly give to low-carbon generation. Secondary legislation will be forthcoming in due course to set a UK-wide 2030 power sector decarbonisation target. We will, of course, be consulted on the issue, not least because we have the single electricity market here in Northern Ireland, working across the island, and it is important that that is taken into account when the target is set.

3.45 pm

So, the Assembly must support the need to give developers confidence and assurance to continue to invest in Northern Ireland's growing renewable industry. I therefore commend the motion to the House. It received universal support in the Executive and I expect that all parties represented there will want that support to be shown in the House as well.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Energy Bill dealing with power sector decarbonisation, as contained in Part 1 of the Energy Bill, as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Lords.

Private Members' Business

Social Investment Model: Tackling Social Issues

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

Mr Frew: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the growing use of the social investment model to tackle a variety of long-standing and extensive social issues; recognises its value in pioneering new approaches and techniques that produce better results for people, shifting risk away from the public sector and only paying on results; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine how such a model could be applied to contracts to help tackle a range of social issues.

We believe that the motion shows the way forward. It is a fact that government budgets have been cut dramatically over the past number of years due to the recession and to the efficiencies that the Tory Government have put in place. It is clear that budgets will continue to be squeezed. That, again, was campaigned for in the Westminster elections by the Tories and is part of their policies. It could mean a further 10% cut in real terms to Stormont departmental spending by the 2017 and 2018 financial years. That will be on top of the current year-on-year so-called efficiency savings of around 3% that will continue for at least another four financial years. How that will be effected depends on Westminster, and, of course, the Tories.

It is also fair to say that during recession, when no one from business, households or any other realm is spending large amounts of money, the Government must. Government must spend to try to get us out of it. That does not mean that we spend unwisely. That does not mean that we throw money at it just for the sake of doing so, just to get cash flow circulating. The real danger in doing that is that we will end up spending money for the sake of it, building things that we do not need built and basically wasting large swathes of public money, which we can ill-afford to do. So, we must spend wisely. We cannot throw money at issues and hope that they will be resolved. We cannot throw money or people at things in the hope of resolving those issues. Much more thinking needs to be put into this.

That is why my party is calling on the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to look at social investment modelling to see if it can help lever in more money and funding to help some of our biggest and historical social issues. As well as improving people's lives, timely and appropriate interventions in a range of areas can result in massive long-term savings for the public purse. The key challenge is to free up sufficient money to be able to invest up front in preventative initiatives, particularly in such unprecedented financial circumstances.

Seeking to unlock cash from private and charitable sectors is important. We are keen to explore social impact bonds, which is only one model that could be used. They are outcomes-based contracts in which external investment

is used to front-load funding for interventions by proven providers, and the Government then pays, on the basis of results, for significant improvements in social outcomes for a defined population.

That will also mean a significant reallocation of risk. The Government has to pay only for effective services. The third-party investor bears all the risk, so the investors and services have an incentive to be as effective as possible and to create the greatest impact that they can with any repayment.

Social impact bonds provide a relatively safe investment opportunity for financial investors and regular citizens to invest in the future of their society. Clearly, the global economic crisis has led to finances being restricted across the charitable and private sectors as well as the public sector. However, there remains interest from private banking networks with clients keen to invest directly in social progress. Northern Ireland is the ideal size for many interventions. Our history means that we are an attractive location for investors, particularly from the United States.

Social impact bonds lend themselves to addressing areas such as crime; children in or on the margins of care; substance addiction; school truancy and exclusion; youth unemployment; public health; and unnecessary hospital admissions. We talk about all those issues in the House, but, unfortunately, government and Departments are not agile enough to be able to achieve the goals that we want to see achieved for the money we throw at it. They offer an opportunity to tackle some of our most intractable social problems. That is why I and my party call for the development of a strategy for engaging investors and putting in place social impact bonds.

I also call on the Minister to institute a team in his Department to look at the issue and to require other Departments to come up with proposed areas in which social impact bonds could be pursued. In the past few years, a new type of investor has entered the public sector market determined to fill any gaps. Those investors are not content with sitting on the sidelines; they have identified companies or not-for-profit organisations that employ interesting and innovative ways of helping particular communities. That is everything that we have been crying out for.

Social impact projects are becoming popular in the rest of the UK, the US and Australia. They are working in areas such as prisoner rehabilitation; young people; vulnerable teens; children's services; homelessness; and adult services. Of course, measures should be put in place not only to measure success but to assess what is feasible. There should be policy success, so that it not only meets policy but does not create any negative, unintended consequences to other services.

We should also ensure that we have adequate experts and service providers to ensure that they have the capacity and capability to deliver the required interventions. We also need to make sure that the arrangements will work for both parties, investors are willing to invest their money, the terms are commensurate to the level of risk that is applied in any given bond or contract and all stakeholders have support for the project. For any project to succeed, it must have buy-in from all persons affected by it and who work in any area or arena that it affects.

A wide range of financial models could be investigated for further consideration. I ask the House to ask the Minister to investigate what can be done and then implement it. Local asset-backed vehicles are a form of public and private partnership that allow public sector bodies to use their land or buildings. Tax incremental financial districts would mean that local councils could borrow against predicted further gains in business rates to finance current physical improvements. Community bonds would allow people to support a charitable cause while knowing that the money will be returned to them at the end of the investment period. Community infrastructure levies could also be explored.

Members, we sit in the House and debate all the issues in and out: youth unemployment; youth intervention; why we send so many people to hospitals; and why waiting lists are so long. Sometimes, we have been guilty of throwing more staff or money at issues. When we judge and try to assess success, we find that that is how we justify it: we have created more GPs, nurses, social workers and such-and-such. However, we need to get down to the nitty-gritty and put in place targets so that intervention means success and which will display that we have kept and prevented people from going to hospital, to prison or into care. That is what we need to do, and that is how we will be judged in the future.

We cannot do this on our own, and Departments cannot do this on their own. Quite simply, they are not agile enough to do it on their own, and there is always the risk with civil servants that the risks are too great and that, if failure happens, it will come down on them. Also, auditors look at them day in and day out, and the fear of auditors among civil servants is mighty.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Does saying that civil servants are risk-averse suggest that civil servants, not Ministers, are in charge of many Departments?

Mr Frew: No, I am not saying that for one moment, but in the day-to-day practicalities of implementing plans in place, there will always be this risk management.

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

Mr Frew: If we can give that risk to the private sector and to charities, and pay them for the benefits that they can produce and put in place aims and objectives for those companies, we will achieve much greater benefits, because they are more agile —

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

Mr Frew: — than government bodies.

Mr McKay: I support the motion. The third sector, as it is described, includes 3,348 community and voluntary organisations in the North. There are 473 social enterprises, a quarter of which are charities and half of which are registered companies. They employ approximately 30,000 people — 4% of the total employees in the North. So, the sector is larger than one might think, and, further to that, it has 46,600 volunteers, which is more than double the amount of employees. That brings an estimated gross value added of £572 million to our local economy. When I think of organisations like this, I think of credit unions, which have been the backbone of many communities throughout Ireland for many years. They are

not-for-profit organisations and are very much at the heart of the community that I come from.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

In the previous mandate, the Executive agreed to work together with the community and voluntary sector as social partners. They said that effective partnership between government and the voluntary and community sector can make a valuable contribution to more responsive and people-centered public services. Bryson Charitable Group is, obviously, a well-known example that most Members will be aware of. It is interesting to note that, this year, it has built on its success and has a further 5% increase in its total staff.

So, there are many success stories out there among those in the third sector, and, indeed, there is a duty on us as MLAs and legislators to ensure that such businesses in the social sector remain viable, both financially and socially, for the foreseeable future. The profits from these organisations do not go to shareholders or to improve individuals' bank balances but are reinvested for the good of society, for the good of the community and for the good of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged in our society. This factors in to the debate that we have been having about well-being, and I have been encouraged by some of the Finance Minister's comments on that area. We need to develop that and establish measurements and government targets. I believe that the third sector has a very important role to play in that area.

In conclusion, I and my party are very happy for the Executive to consider social investment models, and I am happy for the Executive and the Minister to investigate that particular area.

Of course, it should not undermine the excellent public services that we provide here in the North, but the Executive should collectively take a considered approach when looking at that area and when choosing the correct options for the public sector and the third sector.

4.00 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing the issue to the Assembly for debate today. It is important, and very opportune, that we debate this important issue. However, it is somewhat ironic that the proposers brought it forward at this time. Perhaps the DUP and Sinn Féin's failure to agree on the distribution of the public money in the social investment fund is actually part of a cunning plan to undermine such spending. I doubt it, however, but I caution the Members of those parties not to bring any more turnips before the Assembly.

Regardless of the value that some Members may believe the social investment model has in producing better results, it is important to remember that any attempt to implement it here will fall foul of the continued failure of Sinn Féin and the DUP, at least until those parties are removed from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). It has been three years since the social investment fund was launched — conveniently, just before an Assembly election — and no final decisions have been made on funding projects.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I understand and appreciate that small-party syndrome might be kicking in here. He talks about turnips. I could certainly find a place for him on the Agriculture Committee if he so wishes. I work well with him in the Enterprise Committee, so I could certainly get him a place on the Agriculture Committee. His time is his own, and he can talk about what he wants, but does he not realise that that is a totally different issue to what we are talking about and that it will be the Finance and Personnel Minister who will take that forward?

Mr McGlone: I will come to that, Mr Frew. As you know, I inevitably do in these matters. I am contextualising, Paul.

It has been three years since the social investment fund was launched — conveniently, just before an Assembly election — and no final decisions have been made on funding projects. That means that £80 million worth of social investment for deprived communities has been held back because of DUP and Sinn Féin failure. Indeed, the Finance Minister has indicated — I said that I would get to it, Paul — that £15 million from that fund has now been reallocated to other Departments. They have paid out some £400,000 to consultants, but I do not think that that is any comfort to anyone but the consultancy firms themselves.

I do not really want to stray too far from the motion, but I believe that, if we are to debate expanding the use of the social investment model to tackle a variety of long-standing and extensive social issues, we need to examine its use to date. To date, OFMDFM has delivered only failure on the issue. It could be that OFMDFM's social investment fund is just the wrong sort of social investment. It could be that it was intended only ever to be a slush fund, and that is why both Sinn Féin and the DUP have failed to agree on its distribution.

That said, there is clearly a role for properly targeted social investment using much more sophisticated and diverse financing models than the traditional method of grants and philanthropic donations. Indeed, we have a number of very successful social enterprises already operating here in the North. However, there should be caution in any attempt to expand the social investment sector too far too quickly. There is not a single model that should be applied or that can be applied. There is a variety of financing mechanisms and models that may or may not be applicable in particular areas. An ideologically driven push for the effective privatisation of public services must be resisted.

Where appropriate, the social investment model can play a very valuable role in providing much better outcomes. However, any decision to apply that model to a wide and expansive range of varied social issues must take into account much more than a simple calculation of the effect on departmental budgets. The longer-term impact on wider society must also be factored in. That is why it should not be appropriate to leave that decision in the hands of one ministerial office.

I conclude my remarks.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I hope that you were aware that you had an extra minute. I neglected to tell you that.

Mr Cree: Northern Ireland has a variety of longstanding and extensive social issues, to use the words used in the motion. It is the case that we face some unique challenges. In some if not all cases, poverty, child poverty,

deprivation indicators, educational underachievement, mental health inequalities and segregation between communities remain more pronounced here than in other regions of the United Kingdom. It is therefore central to the success of the Assembly that we prove able to deal with them and show tangible improvements.

We have seen some government policy that has attempted to invest in those areas. Delivering Social Change is the framework that seeks to coordinate key actions across Departments to take forward work on priority social policy areas, and there are a number of aspects to it. It is unfortunate that I am following Mr McGlone on this, but the social investment fund comes under that banner and was included in the Programme for Government as a commitment. It included £40 million to address dereliction and promote investment in the physical regeneration of deprived areas and £40 million to improve pathways to employment, to tackle systemic issues linked to deprivation and to increase community services. However, the reality is that the total £80 million of funding has stalled, with little or none directed to those most in need. That is totally unacceptable, given that it is nearly three years since the fund was first discussed. Around £50 million should have been allocated by now.

A recent report from investigative journalist Steven McCaffery at 'The Detail' made for extremely concerning reading, as it points to the fact that the money is not being utilised because of disagreements between the DUP and Sinn Féin over which community should benefit. It would be a ridiculous situation if the two parties currently occupying the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister were holding up the project over another "them and us" argument.

It is my understanding that officials have presented projects that are suitable for funding. That money finding its way to those most in need is long overdue.

In October 2012, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister announced the development of six signature programmes under the Delivering Social Change framework. The aim was to tackle such matters as improving literacy and numeracy levels, family support and the pathways to employment framework for young people. Those are being taken forward by various Departments, with different degrees of progress apparent across the projects. It has become clear, and was cited at the time, that those signature projects were established merely as an attempt to mitigate the failure to implement the social investment fund. Regardless of the dubious reasons for their development, my party hopes that the six projects can deliver real change and improvement where intended.

Lastly, we had the Delivering Social Change conference, at which over 200 delegates from the wider public sector, the business community, the third sector and Executive Departments came together to raise awareness of the issues. I welcome the —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: Certainly. I look forward to this.

Mr Frew: Thanks very much to the Member for giving way. I know that he is closely linked with the Tories in all of this, considering that he campaigned for them when he was joined at the hip with the party at the most recent Westminster election. The word "social" is in the motion's

title, but what he and Patsy McGlone have talked about is a completely separate and different issue from what we are talking about now. He should not be so scared of the word "social" in this context. It is something that we should take forward.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Cree: I do not know whether I should thank the Member for that. Let me assure him that there is no question of being joined at the hip with the Tories. There never was, never is and never will be. However, I welcome the opportunity to work with them if they are a pragmatic party. The difficulty here is that we do not have that advantage.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): That is some way to talk about your colleagues.

Mr Cree: I was going to say something nice now, but I may change my mind.

I welcome the increased focus that that conference gave to tackling poverty and social inclusion, particularly through the private sector. Social exclusion and social deprivation are one and the same animal. We must remember the important work being carried out by organisations such as Bryson Charitable Group, which is Northern Ireland's leading social enterprise. I believe that 91p in every pound is reinvested into that organisation to deliver and develop its services, and the economic model of Bryson is clearly working in that regard.

In conclusion, the motion calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine how a social investment model could be applied to help tackle a range of social issues. As I have already outlined, the success of OFMDFM in particular has been, at best, questionable, and change is, therefore, required in how we deal with social issues. On the other hand, social enterprises such as Bryson have shown that it can be done and done well. I look forward to hearing the contribution from the Minister on this subject.

Mrs Cochrane: No matter where we live, we will be aware, to some extent, of the social problems that we face, whether they are drugs, alcohol, gambling, fraud, violence, knife crime, to name but a few. Each of those problems costs the Government an increasing amount of money to deal with, and much more needs to be done to prevent those issues from arising in the first place.

Governments are usually fairly traditional in their approach to spending money, and little has been spent in the past on testing or trying out new ways to deliver public services. Therefore, programmes can remain unchanged for decades even if they are not delivering the required results. However, we should not be too downhearted. There have been examples over the years of developing innovative approaches to meet social needs. That has included the growth of delivery of services through our voluntary sector and the emergence of the social enterprise industry that we have today.

When public finances are tight, as they are at the moment, perhaps there is no better time to explore options and techniques that will deliver better results for people. By shifting the focus away from the exact nature of the services provided towards the outcomes produced, there is more room for innovation and greater freedom for not-for-profit organisations to demonstrate the effectiveness of

their approach. Social investment models are a means to support that.

So, what is social investment, and how does it work? Put simply, social investment is the provision and use of finance to generate social and financial returns. Social returns are improved outcomes for society, such as a reduction in reoffending or an improvement in public health. Financial returns imply that there must be some expectation on the part of the social investor that they will be able to get their money back in the future with a return. Ventures seeking to attract social investment must develop business models that create social and financial returns. That requires someone — that is, the Government — who is willing to pay for the social value created. In order to work, the price paid for the social value should be more than the cost of creating that social value, and that is how the financial value is created.

Social investment can make a unique contribution to business and jobs. A recent report by the UK Government highlighted how the growth in social investment has helped the social enterprise sector to flourish. With many social enterprises based in poorer areas and actively employing people who are traditionally further from the labour market, such as ex-offenders, there are many benefits to disadvantaged groups and their communities.

Possibly the most interesting areas that we should explore are those of payment-by-results contracts and social impact bonds, as already mentioned by Paul. Traditionally, when a non-state provider has been commissioned to deliver a public service, it is usually on the basis of a contract to undertake specified activity, and payments would be made as long as the terms of the contract were met. However, some Governments are now trying to move away from that model and, instead, use a payment-by-results approach. As the name suggests, payment by results means that a deliverer does not get paid automatically but only if certain results are agreed.

Payment-by-results contracts based on outcomes present a real opportunity for not-for-profit organisations to win public service delivery contracts. This is perhaps the most positive aspect of payment by results.

Social impact bonds are a method of raising investment for a service provider commissioned on a payment-by-results basis. They can be set up in situations where there is a target population and a clear, measurable, positive social outcome that can be achieved by the service provider. Social impact bonds enable investors to put money in on the basis that they will receive a financial return based on a saving to the state if certain agreed social outcomes are delivered. Financial risk is, therefore, transferred away from both the Government and the social venture itself.

This is a fairly new concept. Indeed, most social investment bond projects have been borne out of frustration that public services are reactive and do not focus on preventative efforts. A number of schemes are being delivered, including the London homelessness social impact bond, which was commissioned to deliver services to a cohort of 830 rough sleepers in London.

4.15 pm

I know that, since taking up office, the Minister of Finance and Personnel has been vocal about his desire to reform public sector services. I believe that social investment

models are an area worth exploring. One question that perhaps arises is whether it is acceptable for private investors to pay for addressing social needs and to receive a financial reward for doing so. However, we need to acknowledge that there are risks involved in payment-by-results contracts and the social investment models built upon them. Therefore, there must be returns that make the risks worth taking. Perhaps that is something that we just have to accept if, in the long run, public money is being used to fund only —

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

Mrs Cochrane: — interventions that work, leading to better outcomes for the public. I support the motion.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. Social enterprises have a key role to play in our local economy. They bring many benefits, including reducing disadvantage while creating and sustaining employment opportunities. That not only boosts confidence at community level but promotes innovation and self-reliance along with community and area renewal and regeneration.

The motion recognises the need to rebalance the local economy and help to provide opportunities in the private sector or third sector — as the community and charitable sector is often called — while addressing many of the social challenges that still exist in our society.

The social investment model brings many benefits. We should all support the growing use of that model in helping to tackle many long-standing and wide-reaching social issues that continue to exist in our communities. The social investment model has a valuable role to play in pioneering new techniques and approaches that ultimately produce better results for people. The social investment model, through social impact bonds, puts people to the fore. It is an innovative way of improving people's lives and can result in longer-term savings for the public purse.

An effective, efficient and enterprising third sector will bring real and lasting benefits locally and help to deliver a high-quality service to address the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Despite our recent political progress, many lasting social issues remain unresolved in Northern Ireland. Investment in the social enterprise sector can help to tackle many of those social issues and empower local people and give them ownership to help deliver local projects and have success while making a real input into the local economy.

The Bryson Charitable Group, which a few Members have mentioned, is an example of a successful social enterprise body. We are all now well aware of the many groups — it has seven social enterprise businesses going — that we see working in our communities every day. The latest figures show a 5% increase in Bryson's employment levels from last year. That indicates the scale and success that such a social enterprise can have, as well as the great potential that exists for similar schemes across the Province in many fields of our society. Bryson has quite rightly targeted key areas and topical issues such as fuel poverty, education, health and recycling. We should all encourage and help to develop that across our constituencies.

Social innovation can become a key theme for the Executive. It is only right and proper that our Finance Minister examines and explores the potential of social innovation from charities, social enterprises and other businesses. Social impact bonds are an innovative way of tackling many underlying social issues and can help to mobilise private sector money that is geared towards achieving results.

There is no doubt that a lot of good work is going on across Northern Ireland in the social enterprise sector, but I am convinced that there is greater potential for that sector as we seek to move forward in rebuilding and rebalancing our economy. I know that the Finance Minister has taken an active interest in this subject and I trust that he will acknowledge the key role that social enterprise plays, as well as outlining its potential for the future. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. The motion seems quite innocuous and trouble free. However, I cannot help but feel that there is something hidden away behind it. I am waiting to see what the catch is, because it is never that straightforward with Paul Frew.

It is very clear that socially responsible organisations, particularly social enterprises, can have an impact on dealing with social issues. Many organisations across our society have demonstrated that, and there is much more to it than the whole notion of a "big society", which made up the majority of the information that we have been given on the subject. As a constituency MLA, like others, I know from contact with people on the ground that they see at first hand the positive benefits that social enterprises, charities and voluntary organisations have on their day-to-day lives.

Those organisations deal with really difficult issues such as unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, which Paul Frew mentioned; deprivation; tackling fuel poverty; improving awareness of the advice that is available on how best to spend money on energy to heat homes; dealing with issues of crime and helping victims of crime; and dealing with the whole issue of social isolation and rural deprivation. It is very difficult to get into rural communities and engage with people, and organisations such as social enterprises are very well placed to do that where there is not access to public sector services. That is where those organisations fit in very well.

In my area, given the distance from Belfast and the generational cry that we do not have enough public sector employees, there is a natural role for the social enterprise movement to fill the gaps, particularly in rural areas. Look at issues like the provision of rural transport or home help to people who live on the worst roads. No one really wants to drive on those roads, but people live on them so someone has to get up there and look after people.

The 'Fermanagh Herald' recently held its annual business awards, and it gives out a recurring award for the social enterprise of the year. You will not mind, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, if I mention the top three: Fermanagh Community Transport; Lisbellaw Credit Union; and Lakeland Community Care, which took the top prize. Good work happens across all our constituencies and it is important that we highlight it and commend those involved.

One of the biggest advantages that community-based organisations, social enterprises and charities have is the commitment and dedication of their volunteer members, who bring an added wing to an organisation. You do not get that in a company or in the public sector. I am not going to mention anything about 10:00 am to 4:00 pm; that is not the road I am going down. You find that, where there are small, local social enterprises, there is great commitment of people to those organisations. In places like sporting clubs and credit unions, people are very committed to helping that organisation because they can really see the difference that they are making in helping people in their communities.

As for the role of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, it is important that he raises the issue of tendering and the potential benefit that social enterprises and charities can deliver. It is not simply about the lowest price or best quality; the social outcomes for people in communities also need to be taken into consideration. Social enterprises have a good role to play in delivering very positive social outcomes to people in the community.

I have said that I think that there is something behind the motion, but I do not know what it is. However, at the end of the day, the motion calls on the Minister to explore something, and I am more than happy for the Minister, on behalf of the Executive, to explore the social enterprise model to see what benefits can be brought out. The social enterprise movement, voluntary organisations and community groups have unique strengths that no other type of organisation can deliver. On those grounds, we are more than happy to support the motion.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I declare an interest as a committee member of the Loughshore Care Partnership, which is a voluntary organisation that provides social care to people in rural and isolated communities.

I am very proud of the fact that I, like many of my party colleagues, entered politics via community and voluntary participation, trying to make a difference in our local communities. That is what the social investment model is about, as I understand it. It is an opportunity to come forward with solutions to grass-roots problems in a flexible way and, as other Members said, in a way that is prepared to take some innovative risks. I have to point only to the credit union movement in Ireland; our former party leader John Hume was a key agent in introducing the movement to Ireland.

There are other organisations such as the NOW project, which, as the Minister may know, helps groups of young people with learning disabilities to find gainful employment and provide a service to the local community. We have to look only across to north and west Belfast, and to the Gaeltacht quarter, to see the good work that is being done there through community volunteers who provide employment and tourism opportunities in an area of high deprivation.

Recently, the trade union movement made a presentation to the Committee for Social Development in which it shared some of its concerns about the terms and conditions of employment for workers in what is called the "third sector". We all have to take account of the fact that although it is a cheaper method that is used to save public money, it should not be a tool by which the Government

save money only by imposing lesser terms and conditions on the workers concerned.

The presentation also covered community assets. A number of community assets, whether community houses or former schools, are being used for community facilities, particularly in rural areas. However, I find that one thing that deters people is when we start getting into the management of human resources. Volunteers are often busy people who are fearful about having to manage staff and take responsibility for big financial projects. You can soon lose control of an enterprise because it is successful. Therefore, I would welcome the Minister's thoughts on how we can assist and build capacity in the community and voluntary sector to allay some of those concerns or whether, in having a real partnership with the sector, the Government can take unto themselves some of those human resources responsibilities. I am not saying that that should be the responsibility of central government necessarily but of local authorities and a wide range of departmental providers, if we are really talking about a true partnership approach.

One of the reports that was provided to us in preparation for this debate mentioned a social innovation awards ceremony. I ask the Minister to consider that as a way of showcasing best practice. This methodology is not about having to reinvent the wheel all the time; it is about looking at good ideas to see whether they can be replicated across communities. By using the web, of course, we can talk to other people, learn about their good work practice and identify some of the potential pitfalls.

I also noted an idea about having a "thinker in residence" and the opportunity to mentor. That is an excellent idea, which is particularly suited to people who may have taken early retirement or who had to leave work for a variety of reasons but who can still make a useful contribution to society by sharing their skills and education with others. I would promote the idea of a thinker in residence to OFMDFM in particular; or perhaps that is what Richard Haass is really about. It might not be a bad idea for this Government to have a thinker in residence to deliver some of the Programme for Government objectives and commitments, never mind for the social investment community and voluntary sector.

4.30 pm

Mr Hamilton: I begin by thanking Mr Frew and my other colleagues for tabling the motion. I thank all those Members who contributed to the debate, and I particularly thank those who, in their contributions, quite clearly got what the motion was about. Those Members obviously included Mr Frew — I am glad that he got it given that he moved it. Mr McKay also got it, as did Mrs Cochrane. Even Mr Flanagan, in his cynicism and suspicion, got it. Mr McGlone latterly got it and Mrs Kelly obviously gets the importance of the sector, as do other Members who spoke.

I think that a special prize should be reserved for Mr McGlone for being the first person to see the words "social" and "investment" leaping out of a page and conflate them with another issue that has made the news in recent times. I am not sure what prize we should get him, but, given his fascination with root vegetables, perhaps something from a market garden would suffice.

As many of the Members who contributed to the debate said, Northern Ireland is no different from any number of other states around the world. We are grappling with a whole host of long-standing, seemingly intractable social problems and issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, homelessness, recidivism, poor standards of public health and underachievement in areas of education.

Each of those social problems has the ability to destroy lives, wreck families, and ruin communities. They cost government an ever-increasing amount of money to deal with. Yet, for all of the investment that we have made through the years, sometimes it seems as though very little impact is being made in resolving the problems in spite of the progress we have made in many areas. Some individuals benefit from the help that they receive, but others start to suffer from the same issues and the cycle continues.

I have long believed that simply throwing money at long-standing social problems will rarely, in itself, solve them. When we did have large amounts of public investment in the past decade, the social problems that we in Northern Ireland suffer from did not disappear. Many got worse. As many Members, and particularly Mr Frew, said, now that public expenditure is seriously curtailed, spending our way out of problems, even if it worked, is not really an option. Hence, we need to examine the scope for new and innovative solutions to our problems, especially social problems.

Our instinct is sometimes to ask how the public sector can dream up new ways to tackle old problems. However, as we know from experience, when addressing sensitive deep rooted issues such as homelessness or reoffending or dependency, government is not always best placed to work with the people who need most help. Again, that was something that many Members recognised. The public sector is not where the ideas or expertise often lives. Instead, it often resides outside the public sector in social enterprises, charities, the community and voluntary sector and business. Those are organisations that are embedded in the communities where the problems exist.

We know of the work of social enterprises and charities and community and voluntary organisations that partner with the public sector to provide services ranging from recycling to caring for people with mental health problems. They do exceptional work to a very high standard and frequently cost far less than similar but less effective services that are provided by the public sector. They are a growing part of our economy and deal with social issues in ways that government simply is not able to do.

I think that that point was recognised by every Member who rose to their feet. That included Mr McGlone, who praised the sector but then cautioned us not to go so fast. I also noted the point that Mrs Kelly made about terms and conditions. That point is worth addressing. Frequently, the pay for people in third-sector organisations is less than in the public sector, and I am not surprised that the public sector unions made such representations to the Committee for Social Development. Any body that has a public sector contract must comply with the law on terms and conditions.

Mr McGlone is not in the Chamber, but Mrs Kelly will recall that, in her party's 2011 election manifesto, it committed to:

"commission a study into current levels of community service provisions leading to a strategy and action plan aimed at greater involvement by the voluntary and community sector in health and social care provision here".

Obviously, that was if her party had had the relevant Department. So, the Member's party and, I think, all parties are open to the idea of having more involvement from the sector in resolving the social problems that we face in Northern Ireland. It is my firm belief that it is time that we examine how we can make even greater and better use of the sector in supporting us in government to achieve the outcomes that we have agreed are necessary for Northern Ireland.

We had a debate a few weeks ago about procurement. I know that the third sector is concerned that the procurement system works against it. I think that there is evidence of where it can and does succeed, but perhaps not enough evidence. How we shape contracts can have an impact on what third-sector organisations can bid for and, ultimately, win. Social investment models are one such option for creating opportunities for social enterprises, charities and others to not just attain contracts but to assist us in overcoming those long-standing social ills. I am encouraged by the positive reaction that I received from third-sector organisations to today's motion, such as Bryson, which was frequently mentioned in the debate.

The motion acknowledges the increasing use of such models, and it is worth noting that it is interesting governments in many jurisdictions. Let me briefly identify two such examples. In August 2010, a joint project run by the Ministry of Justice and Social Finance, which is an ethical banking organisation, secured £5 million in social impact bonds to fund rehabilitation work with around 3,000 inmates at Her Majesty's Prison Peterborough. It is funded by investors and provides money for mentors to help ex-prisoners adjust to life outside jail. If those services are successful and reoffending drops by more than 7.5% within six years, investors receive a payment representing a proportion of the cost of reoffending. The payment will increase based on the reduction in reoffending, with the total cost of the project capped at £8 million. Early analysis of the success of the bond at Her Majesty's Prison Peterborough shows that reoffending rates have fallen in contrast to rises nationally.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts recently launched two pilot social innovation financing performance-based investments to help encourage innovation and tackle chronic homelessness and juvenile justice. The pilots utilise pay-for-success contracts, which can be supported by the use of social impact bonds to provide upfront finance and other expertise. Both those examples include two aspects of social innovation financing that I am especially interested in and both of which have been mentioned: payment-by-results contracts and social impact bonds.

Payment by results is a form of commissioning that is outcomes based. It means that public commissioners pay the service provider according to the achieved results of the service. Such commissioning is part of a wider movement to ensure value for money in public services. It can be used for services in which there is a clearly defined target population and there is a measurable

outcome. The aim is to drive improved performance from providers and help commissioners to use resources more efficiently. Their strengths can include increased productivity, innovation from staff engagement and higher quality services. There can be large upfront costs for service providers commissioned on a payment-by-results basis. Social impact bonds, which I will come back to, are a way of meeting the capital costs of payment-by-results contracts.

Payment-by-results contracts are part of a wider shift towards outcomes-based commissioning. That is where a commissioning body agrees to fund a provider on the basis that they will achieve particular agreed outcomes, rather than deliver particular outputs. Payments by results refers to a system in which public service commissioners pay providers according to specified outcomes, as opposed to paying for services at the start of a contract. It is intended to create incentives to drive improved performance from providers and to ensure commissioners use resources more efficiently. The theory is that, because providers will get funding for each extra service user they benefit, they will become more efficient at delivering the desired outcomes. That enables a more devolved and flexible approach with less interference from government in asking providers to meet centralised targets. It should enable organisations to deliver the results in the way that they have chosen, with the ability to innovate in the knowledge that they will be held accountable for the results.

Social impact bonds are a way of financing a payment-by-results contract and can be set up in situations where there is a target population and a clear measurable outcome that can be achieved by the service provider. Under payment by results, government agrees to pay a service provider if, and only if, it achieves certain results. That means that the service provider must cover the initial costs of delivering services. Many potential providers find that difficult, particularly social enterprises and charities, as they often do not have the capital available to provide services in advance of being paid.

A social impact bond is a way to bridge that gap, enabling socially minded investors to fund the provision of a service delivered by a social enterprise or a charity on the basis that they will receive a return on their investment from government if the service delivers the results specified in the payment-by-results agreement. Unlike traditional bonds, social impact bonds do not have a fixed rate of return; financial return depends on the achievement of specific social outcomes set at the start of the bond issue. The higher the social impact, the higher the return earned by the private sector. It is, therefore, important to choose effective and proven civil society organisations.

There are four broad reasons why I am personally attracted to the concept of social innovation financing. First, this approach encourages innovation in tackling social problems. As social issues such as those that I mentioned earlier have worsened in some cases during the downturn, whilst we in government have less funding to address them, it is important that we devise new and better ways to resolve those problems. Because organisations are paid on the basis of the results they achieve, by their nature social innovation contracts encourage and incentivise innovation.

Secondly, and related, social innovation financing rewards results. We should not use public money to pay for

services that do not work, do not produce the outcomes that we want and do nothing to resolve the problems that they are meant to resolve. We should not be satisfied as a Government or a society at continuing to plunge money into programmes that simply are not working. Instead of paying for failure, we should be paying for success. Assessing success on the basis of outcomes automatically instils and encourages innovation.

Thirdly, much of the work that is done via social innovation financing concentrates on prevention: stopping offenders from reoffending, addressing public health issues and tackling drug and alcohol addiction. Naturally, work in any of those areas will solve existing problems, but stopping someone from committing more crimes or helping someone off drink or drugs will prevent further problems from occurring. Far too often, the money that we spend in Government is focused on cleaning up the mess that social ills create instead of stepping in earlier and preventing problems from becoming problems. So long as the outcomes can be measured, payment-by-results contracts can refocus our investments on early intervention and prevention.

Fourthly and finally, social innovation financing encourages social entrepreneurs and can aid in growing our economy. The introduction of payments-by-results contracts — and social innovation financing generally — would not only assist the organisations that secure the contracts to grow and employ people to deliver the required outcomes, but the experience that they would develop innovating in Northern Ireland would present them with opportunities to export to other jurisdictions the expertise they acquired here, bringing value back into Northern Ireland. From social entrepreneurship, we can generate economic and social value.

This is an exciting and intriguing area of policy development, although still somewhat in its infancy. Social innovation financing presents opportunities for Northern Ireland to learn from the early adoption by others in Great Britain or the United States and adapt instruments such as payment by results and social impact bonds to the Northern Ireland environment. I have tasked the public sector reform division in my Department to work with Central Procurement Directorate to develop precisely how social innovation financing can be introduced in Northern Ireland. I have asked them to work with Departments such as Health, Social Development and Justice to scope out the potential for some pilots.

I also intend to engage with the Cabinet Office in Westminster, which already has experience of introducing such social investment models, as well as the European Union, whose social innovation Europe initiative is working to connect policymakers, entrepreneurs in the private and third sectors, and academics to share best practice.

Northern Ireland contends with a wide range of social issues. We should always be on the lookout for new and innovative ways to overcome them. Social innovation financing may have many of the attributes that are capable of discovering creative ways to resolve long-standing social problems, switch our focus from inputs to outcomes and prevent problems from arising, as well as growing a key sector of our economy.

I support the motion.

Mr Douglas: We have had a good debate. There was a wee bit of complaining here and there, but that is to be expected, and I will return to that.

I thank my colleague Mr Frew for bringing the motion to the House. He started off by talking about the Tories in relation to the so-called efficiency savings, but this debate was about much more than that. It was about the social investment model, engaging people and targeting areas. He encouraged the Department of Finance and Personnel to look at the model, and I think that the Minister has already said that he will look at aspects of it.

Mr Frew also talked about unlocking private and charitable finances, and he talked about social impact bonds, which he said were a safe bet for investors. He made a very good point when he said that Northern Ireland is the ideal size for social impact bonds. He mentioned good examples in other countries. He was saying, and this was one of the most important aspects of the motion, that we need a strategy for this and a team to lead it. He put that to the Finance and Personnel Minister.

4.45 pm

He also talked about the opportunities for using land and buildings in relation to community bonds. He discussed how the Civil Service is risk averse, and there was a good debate on that.

I have been involved in some social investment models in the past 25 years with my colleague Mr Newton. One of the projects that I have been involved in is the Connswater Community Greenway, which is an excellent model in east Belfast. It involves a partnership of local people, politicians and businesspeople who have come together and established a £40 million project across east Belfast that will bring the area back to life through rivers.

Interestingly, £23.5 million of the funding for the project came from outside Northern Ireland. So, that was new money, and that is the sort of thing that the Minister is encouraging. I was down at Orangefield yesterday to see a flood alleviation scheme for houses that have been flooded year after year. Here is a social economy project delivering a scheme, along with the Department for Regional Development to address that problem.

One of the things that has come out of the debate is the way that some people look at the social investment model. One of the myths out there is that the model is not businesslike, yet all research shows that social investment models are more likely than some private organisations to possess and use business plans. Another myth is that social enterprises are riskier or less attractive than private businesses. However, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that that is the case. There is also a notion that social enterprises are not successful in raising finances, but groups such as that in east Belfast have been raising millions of pounds in finance and loans to establish projects. A recent report showed that 71% of UK social enterprises obtained at least 75% of the money that they required. That was just a wee bit about myself.

Coming back to the discussion, my colleague Mr McKay talked about charitable and community organisations. He made some very important points. There are over 3,000 of those organisations across Northern Ireland and over 470 social enterprises employing something like 30,000 people. Another aspect that is interesting not just for the

Minister of Finance and Personnel but for the Department for Social Development is that over 46,000 people are involved in volunteering. Northern Ireland has a proud track record of volunteering.

He also mentioned credit unions. In the past, they tended to be in the Catholic/nationalist community, but their scope has widened and there are now credit unions right across Northern Ireland.

He was the first person to talk about Bryson House. Interestingly, although it has a large number of staff, in the last year it increased that number by something like 5%.

He also highlighted another important point, which is that profits from social enterprises do not go into private pockets but instead are reinvested into the community for community benefit in areas such as childcare, green energy or whatever. I think that he was saying that the Northern Ireland Executive should take such an approach to support this.

Mr McGlone, who is not here, spent the early part of his contribution complaining about the social investment fund and the failings of Sinn Féin, the DUP and OFMDFM. He went on to talk about social enterprises and said that they are good models, but he said that there was no single model that you could replicate across Northern Ireland.

Mr Cree reiterated Mr McGlone's concerns about the social investment fund, and he talked about some of those complaints.

He was the second person to mention Bryson and the impact that it makes in recycling, job creation and a range of services.

Mrs Cochrane talked about growth in the voluntary sector. It has been one of the most encouraging things to happen during the past 20 to 30 years. She said that many of the social enterprises are unique to their area and in the work that they do. She mentioned the social and economic benefits, as many Members did. It is not just about social benefits but economic benefits, such as job creation. I was glad to hear her say that many of the social enterprises are located in disadvantaged communities where perhaps the private sector has moved out or does not want to invest. She highlighted the aspect of payment by results.

Mr Dunne talked about the third sector and addressing social benefits. He said that we should support the growing social enterprise model in Northern Ireland. He also talked about Bryson House and the great potential for those types of initiatives right across Northern Ireland. He encouraged the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explore the potential for the social enterprise sector.

Mr Flanagan, who is not here, talked about the motion being trouble-free and said that it must be some sort of Trojan Horse. He said that it could not just be an ordinary motion, there must be something sinister here and the DUP was up to its moves again. He also talked about social enterprise. He said that all of us see at first hand the great work that goes on in those areas. He talked about rural transport and home help. Volunteers were mentioned, and Mr Flanagan talked about their dedication and commitment.

Mrs Kelly talked about her own background. She certainly has had a long background in community and voluntary work, like many Members in the Chamber. She highlighted

credit unions. She praised John Hume, who is obviously the father of credit unions in Northern Ireland. She also mentioned the Gaeltacht Quarter in west Belfast and the tourism work that is done, for example, by the Cultúrlann on the Falls Road. She also made an interesting point about not just buildings but the likes of houses and churches being community assets.

Finally, the Minister talked about the social investment model. He reckoned that, even though there is a wee bit of criticism of the model and fear that it may be a Trojan Horse, we all get it. I think that he is correct: we all get it. He highlighted the major social problems in Northern Ireland. We cannot just go on getting money from everywhere and anywhere. There have to be other funding models. We have to find innovative solutions to these problems. Like many other Members, he mentioned Bryson. He also talked about other models in the world, such as that in GB, where they are tackling major social and economic problems. He mentioned Massachusetts, where they are tackling chronic homelessness. He agreed to investigate many of the aspects of social enterprise and the social investment model.

It has been a fairly healthy debate. Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the growing use of the social investment model to tackle a variety of long-standing and extensive social issues; recognises its value in pioneering new approaches and techniques that produce better results for people, shifting risk away from the public sector and only paying on results; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine how such a model could be applied to contracts to help tackle a range of social issues.

North/South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Cooperation

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

Dr McDonnell: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the review of the North/South implementation bodies and areas for cooperation that has been ongoing since 2007; expresses its disappointment and frustration that the review has not concluded its work more than six years after it started; believes that the expansion of areas of cooperation and implementation across economic, social, educational, health, environmental and other areas serves the interests of the people of the island of Ireland; further notes that the July 2013 North/South Ministerial Council agreed that the review recommendations should be presented to its December 2013 meeting; and urges that there is no further slippage in concluding the review and that its recommendations are actioned urgently.

It is a great privilege to stand here on behalf of the SDLP to show our comprehensive support for North/South cooperation and the North/South bodies that were established as a result of the arrangements that arose from the Good Friday Agreement. I remind colleagues that the agreement was voted for and endorsed by people across this island, North and South. Let me put this quite simply: the SDLP opposes any disingenuous attempt to weaken, reduce or minimise the importance of the necessary North/South cooperation in the context of the Good Friday Agreement, which is its true and proper context. I find it incredible that the North/South review has been ongoing for seven years without any sign of an outcome. It is surely now imperative that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister commit to its completion by December 2013 at the very latest. However, in recent times, we have seen substantial delays, the failures of the DUP and Sinn Féin in government and their inability or unwillingness to fully commit to and implement the detail of the Good Friday Agreement, which was endorsed by the electorate North and South, as I said.

The Good Friday Agreement is the basis of the mandate that we have for the Assembly's very existence. Without it, the Assembly could not exist, never mind legislate. Over the past 15 years, we have found ways to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have a stable devolved Government and the capacity to hold that Government to account within the rules as they are today. However, we have a duty to deepen our relationships not because we are pursuing some political agenda or because North/South cooperation is some sort of Trojan Horse but because it is in the economic and social interests of all our people, North and South. It is in the interests of our people in Northern Ireland to cooperate and to deepen that cooperation with the rest of the island, because that brings with it considerable economic opportunity and the possibility of greater prosperity, which has to be in everyone's interests.

Had it not been for the various North/South institutions and cross-border bodies that were established following the Good Friday Agreement, those opportunities would not have opened up, and these institutions would not work, except in the context of British-Irish institutions and North/South institutions. So, for me and the SDLP, it is absolutely unfortunate that, 15 years on, there are still those in our society and, in particular, in the political community who remain in denial about the nature and significance of the Good Friday Agreement and its potential for political progress and economic prosperity. Unfortunately, there are some who peddle the fiction that the Good Friday Agreement was, in some way, superseded by the St Andrews Agreement. In reality, the St Andrews Agreement was a mere political footnote that moved on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement by generating a few concessions here and there in one or two directions. The St Andrews Agreement did not, in any way, limit the ambition of the original agreement for cooperation.

We believe that the time has now come to begin to finally realise the full ambition of the Good Friday Agreement. The time has come for the two Governments — the British Government and the Irish Government — to complete urgently the review of the St Andrews Agreement so that we can widen and deepen cooperation and reap its full potential for economic and social benefit. We have been waiting for over six years for that review, and, whether the delay is borne of political hostility, political ineptitude or political doubt, political certainty must now be forthcoming at the North/South Ministerial Council. We will continue to push for that political certainty, and we will continue to push to create and put in place all the component parts of a real prosperity process that we hope will flow from that.

5.00 pm

Full North/South cooperation is, for us, a key element of any prosperity process for Northern Ireland. We will continue to welcome progress wherever it is made, and we will never cease to challenge tardiness or unnecessary delay in the interests of building peace and prosperity on this island. Ordinary people of all political persuasions and none conduct their own forms of cross-border cooperation every day of the week, and anyone trying to erect new barriers on the island would be laughed out of office, as ordinary people go about trade, business and industry wherever they see an opportunity to create a pound or a euro and to create economic prosperity. Yet even now, when the benefits of cooperation are manifold and when world leaders come here to commend us and to encourage us in our cooperation and when we are being held up as an example of political progress and peace-making to the rest of the world, there are still those who contrive to sound as mean-spirited and as obstructive as possible about the whole concept. The opponents of the Good Friday Agreement still seek to limit and restrict cooperation on political grounds or, at the extreme end, even attempt to abolish it. Above all, they seek to deny and diminish the fact that North/South cooperation is an expression of the will of people on this island, North and South separately and together, as they move forward to seek separate, positive, practical outworkings of the cooperation from that 1998 agreement. They seek to hide the political reality that has the backing of the largest mandate that ever existed on this island as a whole, but no one can claim to have any mandate to diminish it. Fifteen years on, there are still

those, unfortunately, who remain in denial about the nature and significance of that agreement. There are still some, as I said, who peddle the fiction that it was in some way superseded at St Andrews, when St Andrews was nothing more than a footnote.

The time has come for the two Governments to complete urgently the review of the St Andrews Agreement so that we can widen and deepen cooperation and, particularly for the Northern end, reap its full potential for economic and social benefit. We have waited for over six years for that review, and, whether the delay is borne of doubt or hostility, political certainty must now be forthcoming. The SDLP will continue to push for that certainty and work to build prosperity. We will continue to welcome progress where it is made and will never cease to challenge in the interests of building peace and greater prosperity on this island as a whole.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Mr Mike Nesbitt.

Mr Nesbitt: I want to emphasise that I speak as a Member of the House on this occasion. I do not know if that impacts on the running order.

Mr Spratt: On a point of order.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I was informed in this Chair that you wished to speak as the Chairperson, and that is the reason that you were given precedence. I accept your explanation, and I am happy — to anticipate the point that Mr Spratt is about to make — to revert to the normal speaking order.

Mr Nesbitt: I am happy to wait for my turn to speak as a Member.

Mr Moutray: The motion is simply an attempt by the SDLP to embarrass Sinn Féin. It is a device intended to allow the SDLP to demonstrate its all-Ireland agenda. Put simply, this is a squabble between the nationalist/republican parties in the House.

The DUP supports practical cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that is to the mutual benefit of the peoples of each country. Our position has always been that North/South structures must be accountable to the House. Indeed, we sought and secured that accountability at St Andrews. The St Andrews review of North/South structures has been examining the way in which business is conducted by the implementation bodies. The DUP has always argued that we must achieve value for money and that cooperation does not need to be conducted through burdensome and bureaucratic systems. We support cooperation for mutual benefit but not political structures to satisfy those who need a fig leaf to placate a united Ireland agenda. At a time of ongoing assessment of value for money across government in Northern Ireland, it is clear that, economically and politically, there is no sensible case for the expansion of political structures. Our position has always been and remains that we do not support the creation of additional North/South bodies.

The Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of the Irish Republic can do much good work on the economy, investment, health and other areas that benefit the people of our countries. That can be achieved without costly structures and outside the mould of old political thinking. Given the challenges on the global stage, I am

disappointed but not surprised that the SDLP continues to be wedded to the dogma of the past. We will oppose the motion.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. First, I urge OFMDFM, the Irish Government and the North/South Ministerial Council to conclude the St Andrews review of the North/South implementation bodies and areas of cooperation. OFMDFM is a joint office, and, for our part, Sinn Féin supports the review being concluded as soon as possible.

North/South cooperation is a key element of the Good Friday Agreement that allows us to work together to improve the lives of citizens across Ireland. For example, practical cooperation between North and South has been important in the provision of radiotherapy services at Altnagelvin Hospital that will serve the needs of patients from Donegal and Sligo. The border blocks the natural hinterlands of Fermanagh and Tyrone in Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan, and more needs to be done to ensure that people living along the border corridor have the same opportunities as everyone else. Mobile phone roaming charges is a huge issue in the border counties that affects those who cross the border regularly. It is a significant barrier to the growth of our economy. I am from a border county, so I know the extreme challenges that families and businesses that straddle the border face because of roaming charges. Sinn Féin has championed the cause of having the North/South Ministerial Council address those issues.

Recently, the Department for Employment and Learning outlined the benefits of a strategic investment of £17.2 million that enabled two universities, North and South, to establish 12 major projects to build additional and sustainable research capacity and capability, contributing to the development of the all-Ireland research infrastructure. To name but a few of those 12 projects, the all-Ireland research programme includes research in areas such as a cancer chemistry initiative aimed at developing new treatment options in cancers with high incidence and poor prognosis; research on the economic development of the agrifood sector; and research into the prevention of obesity and diabetes. An evaluation of the impact and benefits of strengthening the all-Ireland research programme highlighted the fact that those projects had introduced effective models of collaborative working; improved the universities' research capabilities; created 58 jobs, including lectureships, postdoctoral research fellows and associates; and enhanced all-Ireland research capacity, which has resulted in enhanced engagement with research centres internationally. That outcome is important in achieving the Barroso task force objective of achieving a 20% increase in drawdown of EU funding by 2015. Clearly, investment in those 12 research projects has had a positive impact on economic growth, workforce skills, productivity, innovation, research and development and creating jobs.

It does not make economic sense to have an island nation of 6.5 million people split into two separate tax, currency and legal systems and two separate economies, with split populations of 4.6 million and 1.9 million people in competition with each other. We need more cooperation, North and South. The border acts as a barrier to investment and growth that stifles the economic potential

of the whole of Ireland. The border separates areas that would not naturally be separated.

For six years, we have waited for the outcomes of the review of North/South cooperation. They have been six years of economic hardship and austerity, in which Administrations across the island have sought ways in which to reduce costs. They have been six years without access to valuable information that would play a vital role in harmonising structures across the island. That will be central to our ability to create a fully integrated, healthy economy and provide services to our citizens, North and South. The border impedes and distorts economic activity, and we need to work together to reduce that distortion.

Many successful businesses and employers cite the border as a key disincentive to extending operations throughout the island. If we had access to the findings of the review, we would have access to evidence that would allow us to enhance cooperation across the island. We would have information about what works and what requires further development. We know that, in some areas, cooperation already happens successfully.

In conclusion, North/South cooperation has made a real difference to many communities on the ground. The North/South Ministerial Council is part of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. We have travelled a long journey since the Good Friday Agreement. The establishment of power-sharing government between parties from very different backgrounds and histories and with very different ideologies has not prevented progress in changing not only the political landscape but the economic, educational, cultural, civic and social landscape.

Mr Nesbitt: For the sake of clarity, I emphasise that I do not believe that I have any mandate or authority to speak as Chair of the Committee on this issue, so I will speak as a Member and as an Ulster Unionist. I apologise in advance, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker; I do not think that I will be able to stay for the entire debate. I intend to attend an event marking the twentieth anniversary of the Shankill bombing, which I think is taking place before the debate will conclude.

The issue raised by the motion is important. The fact that it has already taken six years for the review puts it into the category of the ridiculous. However, I regret that I am unable to support the motion. I see in it a tension between words that broadly indicate a lack of confidence in the review. The expression of "disappointment and frustration" and so on at the start of the motion comes up against the final subclause, which calls for a conclusion to the review and for the recommendations to be "actioned urgently". I do not know about you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but I am not for supporting recommendations that I have not yet seen because they have not yet been written.

I will not support the motion, but that is not to say that I have any difficulty with practical cooperation between the North and the South. Indeed, I fondly remember working with the late Sir George Quigley in the early 1980s. Sir George was the man who first came up with the concept of an eastern economic corridor, which was for the benefit of the two economies, north and south of the border. I well remember Sir George talking about the value of procurement. If hospitals south of the border were procuring medicines and bandages from halfway

across the world, he asked why Northern Ireland could not supplant those suppliers. He said that that would have been a win-win situation, and it would equally have applied vice versa.

Six years is far, far too long to wait for a review. Some of the six North/South bodies that we are talking about do important work, but there is none that could not do a little bit better. I note that, following its plenary meeting in June last year, the North/South Ministerial Council endorsed some recommendations. The first element of the agreement review is the efficiency and value for money of the bodies.

I have also been studying the report of the advisory panel of experts and advisers to the review group, with a particular interest in the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), which has been distributing the Peace moneys and, clearly, hopes to be involved in Peace IV. It is interesting to note that, in that expert review, stakeholders of the SEUPB raised concerns about a lack of customer focus, highlighting a lack of clarity and consistency in communication and a particular concern that intermediate funding bodies could be dissuading groups from applying for funds due to the regulatory burden imposed on Peace moneys.

5.15 pm

The reviewers also asked, because stakeholders asked them to, that the North/South body consider the merits of an executive board for the SEUPB, even though it would not have the usual control or responsibility of a board because the SEUPB operates on behalf of member states and the European Union. This is important, and the question has to be asked, in any review, how the SEUPB connects into Europe and particularly into the Barroso task force. It has to be asked whether what we currently have in the SEUPB is merely a management body or one that can truly reflect the concerns of the people.

I know that council groupings say that we now need a six-month extension. They say that they are not getting the buy-in of community groups and are looking for an extension. The SEUPB is saying that this is not possible because it is merely the manager of a programme. Do we want history to look back on Peace III and say that, in some parts of Northern Ireland, it failed not because of intrinsic problems but because the process was king? Therefore, I believe that we should have an urgent review and a completion of the review, but, unfortunately, I cannot accept recommendations that I have not seen.

Mr McCarthy: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the motion. Indeed, we have supported and welcomed the North/South bodies as part of the Good Friday Agreement back in 1998 because it is clearly in our interests to have cooperation with our neighbours in the South of this island. This is especially true for issues such as the economy, crime and the environment, which cross borders. However, it has become clear that we can cooperate with our neighbours on many other issues, such as tourism, healthcare and, indeed, many other important topics. This is the normal state of affairs for almost every country in the world. Cross-border cooperation improves services for people everywhere, and we in the North of Ireland are no different from anywhere else. We can take advantage of our links to the Republic and Britain to improve life for everyone in this region.

It is obvious that we need institutions for North/South cooperation across the island that provide us with the most effective and transparent mechanism to achieve what is best for all of us. Therefore, any review that has lasted six years and is almost scheduled to come to a conclusion is very long overdue.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: I will.

Mrs D Kelly: Does that not suggest to the Member that there are parties that have seen the findings of the review and are frightened to produce them because it is a good news story?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCarthy: I support what Dolores said. Maybe they will change their mind as we go along, and we look forward to that.

As I understand it, the recommendations are due to be presented at the end of this year, and I look forward to seeing what the thinking will be on how best cooperation can benefit us all. The review will surely present a series of proposals for reform and, indeed, betterment of the North/South implementation bodies and areas for cooperation. I hope that they will be available as soon as possible thereafter and that the Executive, the British Government and the Irish Government will act quickly on those recommendations and implement them urgently. After a wait of six, nearly seven, years, expectations are high. In some respects, we will have to revisit this debate following the publication of that report to ensure that the Assembly is fully engaged in the debate about reform and then plays the fullest hand in delivering those reforms without delay.

The Good Friday Agreement envisaged sensible cooperation between us and the Republic. There is no point in trying to unpick that agreement now, especially not when cooperation can benefit Northern Ireland and has been seen to do so over the years. What is required now is for that long-overdue report to deliver sensible recommendations and for the British and Irish Governments to work with our Assembly and Executive to make sure that any reform is implemented at an early date. We in the Alliance Party look forward to the review's publications, and I support the motion.

Mr Spratt: At the outset, I will say that I hope that the anticipation for the Alliance Party and Mr McCarthy will not be too much longer. You can always wait in anticipation, and I am sure that, eventually, something will happen. I also hope that the proposer has a safe flight to London. He is not here for the end of the debate. It is nice to see him going out to represent his constituents in South Belfast at the Mother of Parliaments.

I intend to keep my remarks brief because I really do not want to get involved in the family squabble that the SDLP is trying to create. I do not think it is for us to be involved in that. However, at a time when the world is still in recession, I have to question the value of potentially adding more layers of bureaucracy to our systems of government, which are already heavily criticised for that very reason. There would be cost and expense, not to mention more meetings, more reports and more work added to the already heavy workloads of MLAs, whether the press or the public think so. I say that of those right around the Chamber. I suspect

that it is merely an opportunity for those on the opposite side of the House to enhance their positions as elections approach next year. I say that to the SDLP.

My party supports cooperation where there are areas of mutual benefit; for example, in health. Bronwyn mentioned the new cancer unit at Altnagelvin in Londonderry. That is something that we all welcome. On Monday of last week, I stood in a House that was united on issues around bowel cancer, because cancer knows no barriers or borders. That is an area where it is sensible to have real and deep cooperation. That is why the Irish Government put some £19 million into the project; indeed, it is being financed by this place as well.

There are other areas of cooperation in road safety, transportation and water issues that my Committee has been involved with. There is every reason for us to cooperate in such areas, where we can, to the benefit of all the people and, indeed, on legislation and offences being committed on both sides of the border and where they can be dealt with. We heard in some of the North/South stuff about cooperation in addressing drug smuggling, human trafficking and all the things that can be dealt with. On road safety, the Driving Change project involves the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the fire services from the border counties in the South and a youth-focused organisation called Public Achievement. That project aims to improve road safety and is funded by the SEUPB and the Department of Finance and Personnel in this place. Those issues are real issues that help people on both sides. Road safety knows no barriers either. However, I do not believe that there is a need to expand the current structures to achieve this; in fact, at a time of financial cutbacks, it would be unreasonable to add further burden to the budget.

The DUP has always been clear that North/South structures must always be accountable to the Assembly, as my colleague said earlier in the debate. The party sought and secured that accountability at St Andrews. The St Andrews review affords an opportunity to look at the way the implementation bodies carry out their business. As I said, it is imperative that they are mutually beneficial as well as being cost-effective, so let us spend the money on the issues that matter to people on both sides of the border.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I do so in the spirit in which, I believe, it has been written and presented to the House this afternoon by the SDLP leader Alasdair McDonnell, my constituency colleague. Having heard all of the contributors so far, I do not see the need for the House to divide on the motion. Members may not share a particular aspect of North/South cooperation — I know that Mike Nesbitt referred to recommendations that he has not yet seen being actioned urgently — but the spirit in which the motion has been drafted will allow all parties to support it, if not every single word then at least in spirit. All the parties who have spoken have said that they value North/South cooperation and share the need to make sure that we do things on a better, more constructive and more positive basis, including on a value-for-money basis.

I remind Members that the review flows from the St Andrews Agreement, which, obviously, flowed from the Good Friday Agreement and the failure to have that implemented. Regardless of whether any party,

grouping or Member likes any aspect of the Good Friday Agreement or the St Andrews Agreement, they are binding agreements, and they are commitments entered into by all the parties. None of the parties got everything —

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. We cannot support the motion on the basis of its wording. It asks for an expansion of bodies. It is on that basis that I think I have already made clear the points on the cost-effective nature of what needs to take place. That is why we oppose the motion.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not read “expansion” as necessarily meaning bureaucracy. It simply means areas of cooperation, and it might mean coordinating policies and sharing institutions. In fact, it might save a lot of money, as well as creating bureaucracy. I still urge the parties to consider looking at this from a more positive perspective, because it does not suggest that there needs to be a different layer of bureaucracy. Indeed, it is far from that.

Hopefully, the review itself will demonstrate the value. I want to repeat this: all Members who have spoken, from all the parties, have indicated clearly their desire to see things working on a basis of cooperation. My colleague Bronwyn McGahan listed areas of cooperation, as did other Members, and joint operations that have benefited all of the citizens of this island. So I commend the motion as a positive attempt to remind all of us, including the Governments, that we need to continue developing in these areas, within this region, across this island, on the basis of mutual cooperation that benefits everybody, so that we are not looking at anything that is not positive or constructive. We are not trying to artificially create some area of cooperation; we are trying to do things on the basis of common sense.

I am disappointed that, 15 years on from the Good Friday Agreement and six years on from St Andrews, we have a situation in which the early enthusiasm, if you like, for the agreement — even around the time of the St Andrews Agreement, people thought we were getting a second wind into the peace process. We had an agreement that would result in the all-inclusive institutions functioning again. There were commitments entered into by all the parties, including the DUP, obviously, which was there and had its own agenda at those negotiations. That is fair enough. It brought its mandate to the table and made its contribution. However, at the end of the day, we made commitments.

5.30 pm

Enthusiasm was developed around 1998 and followed through to six years ago. However, when you dampen enthusiasm and dash people's hopes, you end up in the type of situation that we see almost nightly on our streets in Belfast and other parts of the North. I suggest that any of us could see that, if we were to look around the streets today. So, it is important that we inject further momentum into building the peace process. I have said in the House before that it was frustrating to hear some commentators earlier this year or even at the end of last year talk about how they were fed up to the back teeth listening to people talk about the peace process. Unfortunately, we have been reminded throughout this year that the peace process is far from consolidated and we still have a lot of work to do. That is not just an abstract concept; it is about making sure that all the parties, working with the Governments, clearly

signal to people out there that, if we work together, we can tackle problems, whether they are in disadvantaged communities, at a regional level or at an all-island level.

All the parties have a duty and responsibility to work together to tackle the problems that we face, and, if we can fix a problem on the treatment of cancer, if we can fix road safety, if we can fix policing across the island and if we can resolve problems for communities, that is what people elect us to do. If we have to do that by sharing power in these institutions or if we have to do it by working with our colleagues across both these islands, it is very important.

I stress and remind everyone that we have all made commitments and have all made significant political compromises over the past number of years. Let us not continue to do what we have been doing this past year, which is to squander the efforts that people have made and the sacrifices that people have made throughout the conflict over many years. We have a golden opportunity by completing the review of North/South bodies and areas for cooperation. The review will speak for itself. Let us have the review, let us have it completed, let us do an assessment and let us do what we have to do to build on what clearly has been a success, which all the parties' speakers here this afternoon have testified to.

Mrs D Kelly: I support the motion, and I must begin by expressing my disappointment that we do not have any ministerial representation from either Sinn Féin or the DUP to hear the debate. I have scarcely been in a place where so many people are in a state of denial. People need to remember —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Not just yet. People need to remember that the Good Friday Agreement is an international agreement that the people of Ireland, North and South, voted overwhelmingly in favour of. As many Members will know, this institution exists only because of that agreement, and it is only one strand of the agreement. May I remind Members, particularly those on the opposite Benches, that the second strand of the agreement was North/South cooperation and bodies, as well as a ministerial council? One cannot operate without the other, and I lament the fact that Sinn Féin has failed so miserably in holding the DUP to account on the delivery of North/South implementation bodies. At least two DUP Members boasted in their contribution about holding, under St Andrews, which was an agreement between Sinn Féin, the DUP and the British and Irish Governments —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will give way when I finish this point. Both those parties agreed the St Andrews approach, where the DUP stated that it was holding to account the North/South bodies. If its holding to account of Ministers is anything to go by, given the power that it has been able to exert over the past few days, I do not hold out much for that boast actually finding any reality.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member not agree that it is a bit unfortunate that, when all the parties are trying to be constructive across the House this afternoon, the Member chooses to contradict her party leader, who I spoke to before he left the Chamber and who apologised because he had to go to Westminster this afternoon? The Member's party leader made it clear that

he was not into attacking other parties but simply wanted to promote the cause of North/South cooperation. So, I ask the Member to refrain from making this a party political issue. Furthermore, will the Member not acknowledge that the First Minister and deputy First Minister are out of the country representing the Executive in this area?

Mrs D Kelly: Yes. As Seamus Mallon said recently, they are anywhere but here, where the real problems are.

Mr Maskey is in a delusional state and not just a state of denial. Mr Nesbitt is not far behind him, because he seems to forget that his predecessors were co-authors of the Good Friday Agreement alongside the SDLP. It is much to our regret that moderate unionism, as it has often been described, is resiling from the courage of its predecessors, who gave leadership in the worst years of the Troubles and cooperated to find a solution to our conflict.

In answer to Mr Maskey, it is clear to me and any observer who cares to watch what is going on that Sinn Féin and the DUP have agreed a no-first-strike policy. They have heard what the electorate has had to say about their negativity around the Haass talks. They have answered that call by damping down their Back-Benchers and not actually telling the truth of what is not happening in this region and of the failure to deliver, whether practically, pragmatically or in real terms, the Good Friday Agreement and what people signed up to on a North/South basis. I do not care whether it is pragmatic, but I do care about whether they live up to all the aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.

There are challenges and, indeed, opportunities for us as we build east-west relationships. The Irish Government have been at pains to point out the importance of the relationship with GB. That thawing of relationships has been demonstrated by the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Dublin and the engagement of the previous president, Mary McAleese, with the royal family and the London Government. We recognise that we cannot be totally independent and must be interdependent. We want to look at the interdependent nature of North/South and east-west relationships. That is what the Good Friday Agreement is actually about.

When people talk about what unionism gave up in entering into the Good Friday Agreement, they forget that nationalism, republicanism and the Irish Government gave up articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution. Strand two of the Good Friday Agreement was to look at how those relationships could be built in a non-threatening and friendly way and recognised the fears and misperceptions of unionism and how their rights and needs would be protected when Ireland is united.

It is most unfortunate that Members are in such a state of denial. We in the SDLP have always stood up for the Good Friday Agreement. We have stood up for the wishes of the people of Ireland, North and South. We will continue to do so, whether or not that offends the sensitivities of Mr Maskey.

Mr Cree: Much has been said already. The review of the North/South implementation bodies has been ongoing since 2007 and was part of the St Andrews Agreement. There has been a long period of gestation, but we understand that the review recommendations are due to be presented to the North/South Ministerial Council before the end of the year.

There are six bodies in operation. Three have boards of management, and the other three have chief executives who exercise executive function. Three terms of reference were agreed. The first one is designed to cover efficiency and value for money. The other two are somewhat behind at this point. I understand that work has been done only on the first term of reference but that it is hoped that we will have the full report before the end of the year.

I believe that everyone in the House supports practical, mutually beneficial cross-border cooperation. It is fitting that we continue that work but review the costs incurred by the bodies and ensure that they are as efficient as they can be. At this time, we are considering amendments to the public service pension scheme.

It will be interesting to see whether those same savings will be reflected in the North/South bodies. It will also be interesting to see the number of jobs created by the bodies, and the split between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the value of North/South cooperation, but it must not be seen as anything more than that. The Republic no longer has a claim over this jurisdiction. We are part of the United Kingdom and will remain so until our people decide otherwise, and that is a long way off. Progress and cooperation is not necessarily brought about by the cross-border bodies. We have good relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and that is how it should be.

We have travelled a long way together over the past 15 years. There is now a maturity in relations with the Republic of Ireland. Apart from the recognition of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom, we have seen the Irish Government apologise for the treatment of their citizens who fought for the Allies in the two world wars. There are now attendances at Remembrance Day events, and apologies were made by our Government at Westminster. Her Majesty The Queen made her own unique contribution on her visit to Dublin.

Let us continue to work together, respecting each other's views. The motion before us today urges that:

"there is no further slippage in concluding the Review".

I have no difficulty with that, but I cannot support the suggestion that the "recommendations are actioned urgently." It has already been said that we need to see what the recommendations contain before we support them.

Mr Attwood: I thank everyone who contributed to the debate.

Mr Moutray indicated that he thought that this was some sort of stereotypical exchange, almost, between the SDLP and Sinn Féin. Obviously, I wish to shape it very differently. In my view, the review that arose from the St Andrews Agreement is a matter of political integrity and institutional authority. I say that because the minutes of the NSMC meeting in Dublin in the summer confirm that:

"Ministers noted that the Terms of Reference 1 is now largely complete".

That is the first phase of the review; and that:

"Senior Officials have met and initiated a work programme to take forward Terms of Reference 2 and 3".

That is the future scoping of North/South opportunities arising from the review,

"and that they will conclude their work and present a report with proposals to the next NSMC Institutional Meeting in the autumn",

which means now.

It is my understanding, though I hope I am wrong, that there may not even be an institutional meeting, never mind a report to it or further action taken by the North/South Ministerial Council this Christmas. I say to the Members opposite and everyone in the House that, if, after seven years of doing political business in any aspect of institutional life arising from the Good Friday Agreement, we had not concluded a review, there would be political uproar. If, four months ago, it had been decided that decisions would be taken this autumn in relation to one of the aspects solemnly entered into in the St Andrews Agreement, there would have been a similar reaction. This was not some à la carte approach to making political progress; it was an essential element to bring about the restoration of these institutions. It was not something that you could give up; it was something that you had to embrace. If, this autumn, it transpires that no report is made to the institutional meeting and no report of substance and conclusion is made to the NSMC at Christmas, once again, the integrity of the restoration agreement will be undermined — never mind that economic and other opportunities will be compromised for all our people.

So I say to the DUP that this is a matter of political integrity and institutional authority, which your party and your First Minister entered into at St Andrews, and that has not been fulfilled thus far. I say to all the other Ministers who are involved in all this work and the Irish Government that it is a matter of political integrity and institutional authority that this review concludes after all this time.

5.45 pm

Mr Nesbitt properly referred to the late Sir George Quigley's early work on a north-east corridor, but then became very hesitant about where that work may go. I recommend to Mr Nesbitt and everybody else that they look at the interview with Sir George Quigley in this year's spring edition of 'The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland'. He gave that interview in the early part of this year, a short time before he died.

In that interview, Sir George Quigley, one of the architects of North/South cooperation and the north-east corridor in particular, scoped out where North/South should go. In doing so, he relied on four reports from 2010, 2011 and 2012 that are now in the public domain and which touch on infrastructure, cross-border economic renewal, opportunities for North/South public service provision and general border lands development. Of all those reports, he said:

"The richness of the discourse takes us into an entirely different world. What is now vital is to get it positioned within the mainstream of government thinking, North and South, and to have governments that are determined not to let a single idea that merits follow-up fall on stony ground."

Unfortunately, what I heard from the DUP in this debate is that all that good work is going to fall on stony ground.

The shape and possibility of North/South cooperation, be it done through an institutional or other way, is immense for all our people. We have to realise that the story of economic policy around the world is that when you are a small economy or one of a number of small economies you have to come together in economic zones in order to punch your weight. The experience of African and Asian countries and the China trade area is that the creation of economic zones that respect borders maximises opportunities for the people you serve. When I hear the DUP and, unfortunately, Mr Nesbitt shape the future in narrow ways, I say that they should read the words, from shortly before he died, of one of the architects of North/South.

The words of the DUP, of course, only echo the words of the First Minister. In another interview in 'The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland', which was given in the spring of 2009 — he may or may not have changed his mind since then — the First Minister outlined how he saw North/South being developed. He said:

"I don't think the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic has ever been better than it is at the present time."

That was a position of strength, confidence and authority. Yet, in the answer to the next question in that interview, he revealed his personal and political weakness when he said:

"My antenna go up if people start talking about that kind of cooperation having to be at a structural and formal level. When people want to formalise it in that way it speaks to me of an attempt to change the constitutional relationship between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic."

How wrong he is. Putting that aside, what is really disturbing about his commentary was that he said that if:

"that cooperation means a Minister lifting up a phone, writing a letter or having a meeting, I don't see any difficulty with that."

So, the First Minister's view of North/South cooperation is collapsed down to the level of a phone call, writing a letter or having a meeting. What sort of strategy is that, for the people of this island to compete in a more globally competitive world, that you reduce cooperation to a letter, a phone call or a meeting? Therefore, although I believe that we need more institutional arrangements, I recognise that I cannot, perhaps, convince the Irish Government to go in that direction at this stage. However, let us put down a marker: if you think that the Good Friday Agreement and its ambitions or the outworkings of the St Andrews review are reduced to a letter, a phone call or a meeting, disabuse yourselves of that.

In conclusion, and because I am relentlessly positive about this, I turn to the comments that were made by the two youngest and least experienced Ministers in the Executive, and the leadership that they showed this morning and this afternoon in the Chamber. Mark Durkan took a bold, courageous and right decision in the interests of the Northern Ireland economy. The Minister of Finance and Personnel, at the end of the debate this afternoon, in a marked change from his predecessor, started to veer towards the radical when it came to public and economic

policy. His predecessor veered only towards the theatrical. They showed the way to go. I hope that the First Minister and other Ministers who are responsible for a review that has been run into the stand for seven years take a lead from those two gentlemen.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 32.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCreagh, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCreagh, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Moutray and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the review of the North/South implementation bodies and areas for cooperation that has been ongoing since 2007; expresses its disappointment and frustration that the review has not concluded its work more than six years after it started; believes that the expansion of areas of cooperation and implementation across economic, social, educational, health, environmental and other areas serves the interests of the people of the island of Ireland; further notes that the July 2013 North/South Ministerial Council agreed that the review recommendations should be presented to its December 2013 meeting; and urges that there is no further slippage in concluding the review and that its recommendations are actioned urgently.

6.00 pm

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Armagh Gaol

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes. I call Mr Dominic Bradley. Members who are moving out of the Chamber should do so quietly and with some respect for the Member.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá athas orm an rún seo a mholadh. Táimid anseo le tacaíocht a bhailiú don tionscnamh i gCarcair Ard Mhacha.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members.

Mr D Bradley: I am happy to lead off the debate on the development of Armagh Gaol. I welcome the opportunity that this Adjournment debate gives me to do that. I thought that we may have had a ministerial presence. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case. Nonetheless, I am certain that the message will get back to all those who sit at the Executive table.

In May this year, the previous Minister of the Environment, Alex Attwood, granted planning permission for the redevelopment and conservation of the historic jail in Armagh. The jail has a chequered history. Construction of the original building commenced in 1780, and it was extended to become the Armagh women's prison, which closed its doors in 1986.

People may have different memories of the jail. However, the fact that we are looking to develop a building that may, to some extent, have been divisive, in such a way that all the community will benefit is an indication of the progress that we have made as a society — and I very much welcome that progress.

There is no doubt that the jail has a varied and interesting history. Many local historians wrote about various conditions in the jail down through the years. There is no doubt about it — it is one of Armagh's foremost landmarks. It was designed by the same architect who designed the GPO in Dublin; one Francis Johnston. So, there is an ironic connection between the two buildings, but you will be pleased to hear that I will not go into the detail of that.

This is a very worthwhile project that must happen. It has the potential to secure 200 jobs during the period of construction and refurbishment, and 150 jobs when the building is eventually finished. The resources needed to do the job amount to £25 million. That would be a big ask of the Executive, but I am pleased to say that Armagh City and District Council, through its efforts, has secured £18 million of that funding.

A considerable portion of the funding is coming from a private developer who has considerable experience in this type of work. He has converted a jail in the city of Oxford into a boutique hotel, which has proved to be an extremely successful project economically and socially.

Other funds are coming from the council itself to the tune of £2 million. As well as that, there is £2.3 million coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other bits and pieces of funding coming from sources such as the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Invest Northern Ireland. So, you could say that a cocktail of funding has been assembled, and we now await only the final portion of that cocktail, which amounts to around £6 million. I am here today to ask our colleagues in the Executive to give due consideration to funding this project.

Mr Speaker, you and I have often heard Ministers here talk about shovel-ready projects. At a time when the building industry is on its knees, there is a need to pump-prime it. We heard this morning that, during the recession, the building industry in Northern Ireland lost 30,000 jobs. This project gives us the opportunity to, as I said, pump-prime the industry, albeit in a smallish way. All our efforts combined, both large and small, are important in getting this important industry back on its feet.

As I said, the project will involve establishing a boutique hotel. There are also public realm works that will be done. The location of the jail is at the head of the Mall in Armagh, surrounded by probably the best examples of Georgian architecture in Northern Ireland. When the project is finished, it will be an extremely impressive sight at the head of the Mall. Not only that, but it will be an economic success and will give economic impetus to the city of Armagh.

The funding is being sought to protect the heritage building and parts of the site. The council and its preferred developer have come to an agreement that a profit-share scheme will be initiated when the hotel becomes profitable. That means that the ratepayers of Armagh will benefit on two counts: from the jobs that the project will provide and from the financial return from that share scheme.

As with all projects, I am sure that this one has its sceptics, but the model has been tried and tested. As I said, the council's partner in the project has immense experience in this type of work. Indeed, look at the Crumlin Road Gaol, which was considered to be an eyesore at one time. It has turned out to be a very successful visitor attraction. Indeed, I heard that it has as many, if not more, visitors than the Titanic Quarter itself. So there is potential in these old jail buildings. That has been proven in the Crumlin Road, and I believe that it will also be proven in the context of the Armagh Gaol building.

We have already brought the project to the attention of all the Ministers round the Executive table. I know that it was considered for funding during a previous monitoring round. Unfortunately, at the time, not all Ministers were on board. I am pleased to say that that situation has changed. I believe that there is now unanimous support for the project across all parties in the Executive and, indeed, on Armagh City and District Council. That is very much to be welcomed. I welcome the fact that all of the major parties are represented here today and support the project.

In the meantime, the council has fine-tuned the business case. It will be completed in coming weeks and sent to the Strategic Investment Board. I am hopeful that it will be accepted by the board. It is a unique opportunity to show that when all parts of government — local and regional government — get together and work together, success can come from that. I ask all colleagues at the Executive table to give very positive consideration to this project when it arrives on their desks in the next number of weeks.

As I said, I am grateful to my colleagues from Newry and Armagh, and the others who have waited for the debate. It is seldom that I get the chance to address a hushed Chamber that listens so intently to all my words. I am taking every advantage of it today.

As I said, it is a shovel-ready project. It can be on site in 2014. I hope that the Executive will take the necessary action to ensure that. Thank you very much.

Mr Irwin: First of all, I thank my colleague Dominic Bradley for tabling the Adjournment topic on what is a very important development plan for Armagh city.

It was with some concern that I noted, earlier in the summer, that one party, Sinn Féin, had refused to give its support for an award for funding to support the Armagh Gaol development project to be made in the October monitoring round. The fact that the Finance Minister at the time, Sammy Wilson, had recognised the importance of the project to Armagh city and was prepared to offer financial assistance was of huge importance. The offer, however, was given a cool reception from Sinn Féin at the time. As is recorded in an answer to my colleague Peter Weir MLA from Sammy Wilson in this House, the offer was ready to be made, only for Sinn Féin's mysteriously hitting the brakes on the issue. We are yet to have a suitable explanation of the reason for that delay.

I am a member of Armagh City and District Council. The jail redevelopment has been an important focus for the council for some years. It represents, in real terms, a £24 million undertaking, being led, primarily, by the Trevor Osborne Group, the Prince's Regeneration Trust and Armagh council. Funding opportunities that have been committed to date include 33% from the private developer, around £2 million from Armagh council and £2.3 million from the National Lottery, with the Executive being invited to make a significant contribution of around £6 million. Other funding opportunities are continually being investigated and actively pursued, and there is an overwhelming sense of purpose from all who are involved to see the project through to a successful conclusion.

6.15 pm

The location of the jail at the end of the picturesque mall in the city cries out for a project that will see the building restored to pristine condition. Given the success story of the Oxford jail hotel, which I had the pleasure of visiting a number of years ago — not, might I add, as an inmate — the council is very keen to see a similar asset created in Armagh.

Hotel accommodation in the city, especially for events, and, indeed, at other peak times, is oversubscribed. The city badly needs additional bed spaces. In my opinion, the fact that the jail development offers that, as well as a unique visitor experience, makes the project a real gem for the city. The development would see around

200 construction jobs supported in the area, and, when operational, it would directly create 150 jobs. Those would be important advances for the city in sustaining economic stability and, indeed, promoting growth in the tourism sector.

Armagh is a historic city, and the architecture around the city, including the jail itself, must be preserved. With the expertise of the Osborne Group and the support of the Prince's Regeneration Trust, I believe that that will be achievable.

It is vital that Sinn Féin gets fully behind the project. Indeed, its councillor colleagues on Armagh council have given their support to the project. There is no reason, therefore, why an offer of funding from the Executive cannot be fully agreed. I am aware that a final business case is being finalised at the moment, with the intention of having the document with the Strategic Investment Board within a matter of weeks. I urge that the matter be progressed quickly so that Armagh city can be permitted to fully realise the potential that the site's regeneration would bring.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt sa díospóireacht seo.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I thank Mr Bradley for securing it. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I just want to say a few things in response to Mr Irwin about my party's involvement in this case. I have an office in Armagh city, and a lot of the people who I represent feel that Armagh city has been neglected and that it is in the neglected end of the Newry and Armagh constituency. We have fully supported this project, and I have met a number of people about it. However, I will explain to Mr Irwin why some shadow has been cast over it in recent months.

As he said, my colleagues in the council have fully supported the project, as have I, because I know about the potential benefits that it can bring to Armagh city and district. The two Members who spoke previously clearly outlined the benefits of the project in creating jobs and securing staff jobs in Armagh, which are badly needed. Research has already been done on the number of bed nights that Armagh will need, and the project would certainly secure them. So, as I said, I am fully supportive.

However, I want to say a few things about this. At the end of this whole process, we will receive freedom of information requests and questions about public funding, public moneys and accountability. That is what this is about. So, my starting point is that I support the project. Mr Bradley already mentioned that there is a cocktail of funding for it, but we have to account for every single penny of public moneys, no matter what project it is. I just wanted to delve into that a wee bit, because, although Mr Bradley set the tone for the debate very well and welcomed everyone to speak on this, the second Member to speak threw down a challenge. Having an office in Armagh city itself, I deal with people there every day, and I am very familiar with the city.

As a Sinn Féin representative, I take this opportunity to say that I fully support, in principle, the potential investment in Armagh city and district and the potential redevelopment of the Armagh Gaol site.

There is absolutely no doubt that the jail site is of significant importance to the city and people of Armagh,

and the building is in urgent need of some sort of development to safeguard and preserve its existence. The building is an integral part of the fabric of the city physically and as part of social history, not least given the significance of the role played by the women prisoners during the blanket protests of the 1970s and 1980s. Proposals to regenerate the building and the surrounding area are undoubtedly extremely exciting and encouraging, and we look forward to the presentation of a business case on the proposed project. The business case is the key to it all, and Mr Bradley said that the council will now bring it forward. I support what he said, and we hope to support fully the business case when presented.

The scope of the project is suitably ambitious and a structural investment capable of being the catalyst for much-needed regeneration and development in the area. That having been said, and without wishing to be in any way critical of the proposal, it is imperative that the project be viable and sustainable in the long term and that the development complement rather than threaten the existing businesses in the area. In that respect, we look forward to the presentation of the business case to provide reassurance.

It goes without saying that we cannot become blinded by the opportunity prospects to such an extent that we do not take proper account of the risks associated with such a development. In particular, the prospect of having another hotel in such close proximity to the existing hotel could perhaps create conditions in which neither building can thrive. I do not want to put a dampener on this, because we are supporting Mr Bradley, but it is my and my party's belief that in the business case we have to be accountable.

Members have mentioned the amount of money that has been secured and said that there is good private sponsorship behind all this, and we do not have any problem in supporting that. A remark was made at council, but unfortunately I am not on the council any more. It is a pity that I was not at the council when the remark was made. Leaving that aside, my fellow councillors will no doubt respond to that remark in time.

In summary, we look forward with anticipation and interest to seeing the business case for the development, and provided that it provides backbone to the development proposals, we are happy to support any project that will bring jobs to Armagh or that will regenerate and revitalise the mall, which is a beautiful part of Armagh city.

Mrs Dobson: I congratulate Mr Bradley on securing this evening's debate. As we know, Armagh Gaol is a listed building that was constructed in 1780 and closed in 1986. It is considered one of Northern Ireland's most important historic buildings, and it is certainly a landmark building in the city of Armagh.

The jail originally comprised three separate prisons, but it is probably known most prominently as a women's prison. Indeed, it was Northern Ireland's only women's prison during the Troubles until it closed and all prisoners were transferred to Maghaberry in Lisburn. The number of female political prisoners grew from two in 1971 to more than 100 between 1972 and 1976. I also note that, owing to the growing prison population during the Troubles, Armagh housed male remand and sentenced prisoners as well. The jail has a distinct history and an importance to the city.

In May, Armagh City and District Council granted planning permission to build a four-star hotel within the old jail in Armagh. That followed an 18-month planning process. At that time, it was reported that 90% of the £23 million of funding had been secured. The plan was for the hotel to retain the features of the jail with each en suite bedroom created by joining three cells together. As well as a boutique hotel, the jail development was also to include public spaces, 28 apartments, restaurants, commercial space, and a heritage and community centre.

This obviously has the potential to be a huge redevelopment scheme that will benefit the whole of Armagh and the surrounding area. It will also contribute to the tourism potential of the Armagh area, providing much-needed tourist accommodation in the city and attracting people from near and far. As with all sites of a sensitive nature, particularly those linked to the legacy of the Troubles, it is important that sensitivity is displayed at all times in how it is developed and that there is buy-in from right across the community. I believe that to be the case in this example.

As we heard in the media today, and as local people know only too well, the site remains undeveloped, despite the millions in funding earmarked for the jail. As Kevin Sharkey remarked on 'Good Morning Ulster', weeds are growing out of the roof and walls of the building. I am sure that that was not what was envisaged in May, when planning was approved.

I was encouraged to hear the chief executive of Armagh council state that a business plan would be finalised in the next two to three weeks, and that it would confirm that it is a £25 million project. However, gap funding of around £6 million still needs to be found, and, until that happens, the whole project remains unable to progress and, therefore, in doubt.

I again thank Mr Bradley for securing the Adjournment debate. Like others, I sincerely hope that the necessary funding is secured to take forward the refurbishment and renovation of Armagh Gaol.

Adjourned at 6.26 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Environment

Publication of Revised Draft PPS 15 — Planning & Flood Risk — for Public Consultation

Published at 1 pm on Thursday 10 October 2013

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I am pleased to inform Assembly members that the Executive, at its meeting on 3 October 2013, agreed to the publication of Revised Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 15, titled 'Planning and Flood risk', which I am now issuing for 12 weeks public consultation..

Revised Draft PPS 15 sets out the Department's planning policies to minimise flood risk to people, property and the environment. Its primary aim is "to prevent future development that may be at risk from flooding or that may increase the risk of flooding elsewhere".

In June 2006, when PPS 15 was first issued, a commitment was given to review this important policy document within 5 years of its publication. The purpose of this commitment was to make sure planning policy on flood risk remains relevant and up to date taking into account evolving information on climate change as well as new evidence and experience of implementing flood risk policy.

Since 2006, there have been a number of important changes in the policy context that have underpinned this review of existing planning policy on flood risk. The European Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood risks (the Floods Directive) came into force in November 2007 and was transposed into local legislation in 2009. This has led to significant improvements in regard to the quantity and quality of flood risk information now available through the ongoing implementation of the EU Floods Directive in Northern Ireland by DARD, as the competent authority.

Other significant developments include ongoing inter-departmental work aimed at promoting the use of sustainable drainage systems within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, a Reservoirs Bill is due to be enacted next year that will set out provisions for the management of this new source of flood risk highlighted by the Floods Directive.

The Review of this PPS is therefore well-timed and I am pleased to be issuing it today for public consultation.

The revised draft contains 5 operational policies. Four of these policies, FLD 1 to FLD4 are carried forward from the existing PPS 15. While the overall thrust of the policies

remains the same, some amendments have been made to provide greater clarity or to take account of current best practice. There is one new policy, FLD 5, which sets out planning policy for development in proximity to reservoirs.

Policy FLD 1 continues the general presumption against development in the flood plains of rivers and the sea. The main features of the revised policy are as follows:

- Continued provision for the development of previously developed land protected by flood defences. However, due to the residual flood risk in these locations, the revised policy proposes to prevent certain types of development such as essential infrastructure and bespoke development for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, infirm and children.
- Continued presumption against most forms of development within the undefended flood plain. However, the original 'exception' for seasonal occupation of land by touring caravans etc has been withdrawn in the revised policy and other minor amendments to exceptions have been made. The revised policy also proposes a new exception allowing for development within the coastal flood plain where the land is raised through infilling to an acceptable level above the flood plain.
- The existing policy allows for development proposals of overriding regional importance and this is expanded to also allow for proposals of sub-regional economic importance. The policy requires developers to demonstrate the economic importance of such proposals and to justify why a location within the floodplain is considered necessary.
- The revised policy now allows for minor development, such as extensions to dwellings, within the flood plain.
- The revised policy lists certain flood protection and management measures that will not be considered acceptable, where proposed by private developers, in order to facilitate development within flood plains.

Policy FLD 2 seeks to prevent development that would hinder the operation and maintenance of existing flood defences and the revised policy extends such protection to cover drainage infrastructure, including watercourses.

Policy FLD 3 seeks to manage development in areas subject to surface water flood risk. The revised policy clarifies the circumstances in which a drainage assessment is required and confirms that planning permission will be granted where it is demonstrated through the drainage assessment that adequate measures will be put in place so as to effectively mitigate the flood risk to the proposed development and elsewhere. The

revised policy also introduces an onus on developers to assess and mitigate the flood risk in circumstances where a formal drainage assessment is not required, such as smaller scale development in areas where there is potential for surface water flooding, as indicated for example by the DARD Strategic Flood Map.

Policy FLD 4 continues the existing policy in seeking to prevent the artificial modification of watercourses (including culverting and canalisation) in all but prescribed circumstances. The revised policy proposes to amend some of the existing exceptions so as to clarify more precisely the circumstances in which such works can be carried out. This will not only reduce flood risk but will also secure environmental benefits such as enhancement of biodiversity.

Policy FLD 5, is an entirely new policy which seeks to manage development in proximity to reservoirs with a capacity greater than 10,000 cubic metres. Reservoirs pose a particular flood risk because of the potential for sudden and deep inundation in the event of failure or overtopping of the impounding structure or the controlled release of water from the reservoir. Under Policy FLD 5 the onus will be on the applicant to provide assurance that the reservoir is safe and to provide a flood risk assessment along with the planning application. There will be a presumption against certain types of development, for example essential infrastructure and bespoke accommodation for vulnerable groups, within flood inundation areas. Development will also be prevented in specific areas where there is potential for sudden and deep inundation.

Revised Draft PPS 15 also incorporates **5 Annexes** which provide updated guidance on various aspects of flood risk management such as sustainable stormwater management and the assessment of flood risk and drainage impact. This includes new guidance on flood proofing of buildings, including flood resistant and resilient construction.

While flooding is a natural phenomenon that cannot be entirely eliminated, we in government need to do all we can to address this recurring problem which can have devastating impacts on the individuals and communities affected. I believe it is important to ensure that the planning system continues to manage new development so as to further reduce the risk of flooding to people and property.

I am delighted that there is much joined-up work in tackling flooding currently being progressed. Revised Draft PPS 15 is one important example of this. I would like to record my thanks to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whose officials from DARD Rivers Agency have made an invaluable contribution to the review of the existing policy and in helping to bring forward this draft revised policy document.

My Executive colleagues have been consulted on Revised Draft PPS 15 and I am pleased that it has been broadly welcomed. Following the public consultation process, I intend to seek Executive approval before the publication of the final PPS.

Copies of this written statement have been placed in Assembly Member's pigeon holes. A copy of Draft Revised PPS15 is available to view or download from the Departmental website planningni.gov.uk/draftrevisedPPS15.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Organ Donation

Published at 8.30 am on Wednesday 16 October 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Written Statement to the Assembly to update Members on the public engagement programme to establish attitudes towards organ donation in Northern Ireland.

Earlier this year I announced that I intended to initiate a public engagement process to establish attitudes towards organ donation in order to inform my decision on the future policy for organ donation in Northern Ireland; this work was taken forward by the Public Health Agency and consisted of a public attitude survey and focus group meetings.

I now wish to advise that the Public Health Agency has completed this work and plans to publish the report on its findings at 8.30 am on 16 October. The Public Health Agency will also announce plans for the launch of a major information campaign on organ donation, which is expected to run in the New Year. Should Members wish to obtain a copy of the report, it can be found on the Public Health Agency's website at www.publichealth.hsni.net.

I now intend to consider the report before making a decision on the future policy for organ donation, including the option of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation.

Regional Development

Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation

Published at 12.00 noon on Thursday 17 October 2013

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Members will be aware of the importance of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for Northern Ireland. It is important because of our location on the periphery of Europe, and our requirement to develop a transport network that ensures that we are not disadvantaged in terms of competing and participating nationally and internationally. My Department has already been successful in competing for funding through the EU's existing TEN-T programme to improve our roads and railways, and it is my intention that this continues in the next programme.

For these reasons I have taken a keen interest in the EU negotiations for a new TEN-T Regulation and the associated funding facility. I engaged pro-actively with key EU decision makers, including the Chair of the European Parliament's Transport Committee who accepted my invitation to visit Northern Ireland last year, the European Transport Commissioner, the UK Secretary of State for Transport, MEP's and Ministers from other jurisdictions.

I have kept the Committee for Regional Development and key stakeholders informed throughout the co-decision process, particularly as the Regulation entered the closing stages of negotiations. The Regulation is on track for a first reading agreement between the European Parliament, Council and Commission. It is envisaged it will be supported by the European Parliament at their Plenary Vote and adopted by Council later this year. I would like to provide Members with a full update of the positive outcome negotiated for Northern Ireland.

The amendments we have secured will ensure that Northern Ireland will not be subject to costly and inappropriate infrastructure demands and binding deadlines. In real terms this means that Northern Ireland will not be forced to spend some £1.46 billion on our rail network and £13 billion on our roads in order to meet what is clearly unjustifiable expenditure and otherwise risk infraction proceedings. This cost would have had to be borne by the Executive; it would have been money from our own resources. It is fair to say that had this policy been allowed to progress unchallenged, Northern Ireland could have faced a budgetary crisis on a huge scale. In addition, following my positive interventions, key transport routes in Northern Ireland have been maintained on the TEN-T Network, with the associated opportunity of EU funding.

I have lobbied extensively for the inclusion of Londonderry on the Core Network, and I have been supported in this by the Committee for Regional Development. This would provide true EU added value by improving access to the internal market across two Member States and promoting the competitiveness of this regional gateway. Therefore, I do not accept the European Commission's position which does not include Londonderry on the Core Network, although it will now be included in the TEN-T Comprehensive Network.

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Regulation, which determines the conditions, methods and procedures for the Europe's contribution to TEN projects, is also on track for a first Reading agreement. It is envisaged this will also be supported by the European Parliament at their Plenary Vote and adopted by Council later this year. As a result of changes we worked with London to push for it is now much more likely that Northern Ireland will be in a stronger position to bid for EU funding for our TEN-T Comprehensive Network. This means that projects on Londonderry's transport links could still be eligible to bid for EU funding.

Whilst bidding for funding from the CEF for investment in infrastructure will be a highly competitive process, the outcome of the negotiations will put Northern Ireland in a significantly improved position.

These achievements are a result of consistent engagement on this issue. I would also like to put on record my appreciation for the help and assistance that I have received from Northern Ireland's MEPs, who tabled amendments on my behalf and provided invaluable advice on engaging with Europe on these matters.

Our achievements ensure that Northern Ireland's transport infrastructure will continue be a constructive and contributing part of Europe's vision for the future development of high-performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European transport networks.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I am able to share with Members this positive outcome; one which secures our participation in Networks that provide genuine and tangible opportunities to support growth and improve competitiveness in Northern Ireland and across Europe, through more efficient and effective movement of goods and people.

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 4 October 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Child Internet Safety

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking on internet safety for children and young people.

(AQW 25642/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Department carries out a co-ordinating role with a number of partners, including other relevant departments and agencies, which have a remit for policing, regulating and raising public awareness around internet use in order to protect children and young people online.

The actions which our Department is currently taking include working with the UK Safer Internet Centre to raise awareness of safer internet issues through participating in Safer Internet Day; working with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to identify potential areas for collaborative working; commissioning a survey of internet use among P7 pupils across the region; taking forward a review of activity across relevant Departments to identify current actions, gaps and any further actions that could be taken to enhance internet safety; liaising with external organisations such as NSPCC and the National Children's Bureau in Northern Ireland. The opportunities for cross-departmental action in response to the findings of the above are currently under consideration.

Social Investment Fund: Regional Support Contracts

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who are the regional support providers appointed to assist community organisations complete application forms for the Social Investment Fund; and what is the financial value of these contracts.

(AQW 25656/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The process by which projects were submitted to the Department for consideration for funding did not involve application forms being submitted by community organisations.

The Social Investment Fund Steering Groups prepared area plans for their zones, which included economic appraisals for up to ten proposed projects within their areas. RSM McClure Waters, Wallace Consulting, Deloitte and Copius Consulting were appointed to assist the Steering Groups to complete the final area plans and economic appraisals for assessment by OFMDFM. The full value of the contracts are not yet finalised as the consultants are still undertaking work in relation to the Departmental review of the Appraisals.

Victims and Survivors Service: Funding Applications

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what account is taken of current Peace funding to an applicant group when such a group seeks funding from the Victims and Survivor Service.

(AQW 25679/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) has advised us that every group applying for funding from the Victims Support Programme (VSP) is obliged to list all the sources of funding on their application. Costs covered by other organisations are not eligible for funding by the VSP.

It is a contractual requirement that the applicant does not double fund any of its activities. This is checked as part of the pre-contracting check, carried out by VSS staff prior to release of the letter of offer.

Social Investment Fund: Offers

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund, including when offers of funding will be made to community organisations.

(AQW 25709/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Strategic area plans were received by the Department on 28 February 2013. Each zone submitted economic appraisals for up to ten projects within their area plans. These are currently being considered as part of a comprehensive appraisal process.

Social Investment Fund: Delivery

Mr Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the delivery of the Social Investment Fund within each of the nine zones.

(AQW 25766/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Strategic area plans were received by the Department on 28 February 2013. Each zone submitted economic appraisals for up to ten projects within their area plans. These are currently being considered as part of a comprehensive appraisal process.

Social Investment Fund: Western Zone

Mr Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Social Investment Fund, when the Western Zone held its last meeting; and whether all the members were notified that the meeting would take place.

(AQW 25767/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Western Zone Steering Group most recently met on 6 June 2013. All members were notified of the meeting.

Delivering Social Change

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on each of the six Signature Programmes under Delivering Social Change.

(AQW 25954/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work on the implementation of the 6 Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes, which were announced by us on 10 October 2012, is progressing well.

The Department of Education is leading on the signature programme to improve literacy and numeracy levels in both primary and post-primary schools.

This programme will see, approximately, an additional 234 recently graduated teachers, who are not currently in work, being recruited to deliver tuition to children in a total of 267 primary and post-primary schools who are currently struggling to achieve even basic educational standards.

Recruitment of the teachers progressed well during the summer and a number are already in post. The Department of Education is anticipating that all posts will be filled by the end of October 2013.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has lead responsibility for 2 of the signature programmes – the provision of additional Family Support Hubs, and Support for Parents.

The Family Support Hubs Programme will see 16 existing Family Support Hubs receiving continued support, and 10 new Family Support Hubs being established.

Significant progress has been made to date with regard to the establishment of the new Hubs with development infrastructure fully in place, and it is anticipated that all 10 new Hubs will be online by April 2014; indeed 2 are already operating in the Northern Trust Area.

In respect of the Support for Parents Signature Programme, a suite of programmes has been developed. Through these programmes, guidance, training and information will be provided for up to 1,200 families.

The Department for Social Development is working in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the programme to create 11 Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs. Through this programme, Hubs will be established in currently vacant commercial premises and will offer a range of business advice and practical support to social enterprise entrepreneurs.

Good progress has been made with leases due to be signed for 9 Hub locations by October 2013 and the remaining 2 Hubs established by January 2014.

The Department for Social Development has been tasked, in collaboration with the Department of Education, to deliver 20 new nurture units within school settings. In line with the objectives of the programme, 20 teachers and 20 classroom assistants have been recruited and the nurture units are now in place for the 2013/14 academic year. It is anticipated 480 children and their families will benefit from the units.

The sixth and final signature programme will see the scaling up and rolling out, by the Department for Employment and Learning, of a pilot intervention to support young people, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and their families.

From October, the pilot intervention, which targeted 44 families in urban and rural areas, is being replicated to reach up to 720 disadvantaged families.

Further details on specific aspects of each of the signature programmes should be sought directly from the lead departments.

Planning Applications: East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many planning applications in East Antrim are with the Planning Appeals Commission.

(AQW 25995/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its status, we have asked its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you.

Planning Applications: South Antrim

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many planning applications in South Antrim are with the Planning Appeals Commission.

(AQW 26146/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its status, we have asked its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you.

Play and Leisure Policy

Ms Ruane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Play and Leisure Strategy.

(AQO 4592/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In 2008, the Executive approved a Play and Leisure Policy Statement which set out its commitment to delivering on children and young people's play and leisure needs and on their right to engage in these activities.

The Policy Statement is delivered through the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan which was devised in collaboration with the voluntary, community and statutory sectors and runs until 2016.

Delivery against the plan is on track. Examples of key actions completed to date include the following:

- baseline information on Children and Young People's experiences within public spaces has been gathered;
- 'PlayShaper' and 'Managing Risk in Play' Seminars have been held;
- a Regional Mapping System has been developed to inform distribution and sufficiency of play facilities; and
- a review of the Road Safety Education Service has been undertaken by the Department of the Environment.

We remain committed to overseeing and supporting delivery of the plan and are seeking to ensure the greatest benefits are achieved through effective targeting of resources.

Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators update, what co-operation there has been with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to set and monitor indicators and outcomes.

(AQW 26268/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM, in collaboration with other departments, developed the Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators to measure progress against the high level outcomes of the Ten Year Children and Young People's Strategy 'Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge'. Since the development of the indicators, statisticians from OFMDFM have also worked with officials from the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) to ensure that the indicators developed to monitor progress against the Children and Young People's Integrated Plan (developed by the partnership) were consistent with the outcomes and indicators in the strategy. The Plan monitors outcomes at a local level and therefore some of the indicators use different data sources to the Strategic Indicators.

OFMDFM has since commissioned work by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Centre in the University of Ulster to develop a children and young people's rights indicator framework. This work is due to be completed in Autumn 2013 and representatives from the CYPSP sit on the advisory group for the research project. The CYPSP has also been involved in consultative workshops during the development of the framework.

Social Investment Fund: Applications

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 25601/11-15, how many applications have been made from each designated area.

(AQW 26274/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Each zone has ten projects currently under consideration within the Department.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Broadband: Rural Infrastructure

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Rural Broadband infrastructure upgrade.

(AQW 25684/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department is contributing £5m of Rural Development Programme funding to the NI Improved Broadband Project. My officials have completed an analysis of rural broadband not spots and I have agreed the methodology for prioritising broadband spend will be based on multiple deprivation. The project aims to deliver 2 Megabits per second broadband services to all premises across the north of Ireland. It is expected that procurement will commence shortly. As you may already be aware my Department has already invested £1.5m in rural broadband.

Greyhounds

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there are plans to amend or review the Control of Greyhounds etc. Act (Northern Ireland) 1950, specifically the requirement for greyhounds to be muzzled when exercised in public places.

(AQW 25696/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No specific Department has responsibility for the Control of Greyhounds etc. Act 1950; however, my Department has policy and legislative responsibility for animal welfare, dog control, the identification and licensing of dogs and dog breeding.

Any amendment to, or repeal of, the 1950 Act would need to be taken forward through the Assembly and I am already committed to the introduction of a number of pieces of primary legislation in the Assembly in this current mandate. A review of the 1950 Act is not one of my current priorities.

Before making any decision to review the 1950 Act and bring forward amendments, I would want to examine all the available arguments for and against tighter controls on greyhounds as compared to other breeds of dogs. I would also like to engage with stakeholders, particularly Councils given their role in enforcing the dog control legislation here.

Funding: South Down

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding provided through the (i) Single Farm Payment; (ii) Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance; (iii) Rural Development Programme; and (iv) Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme, in the South Down constituency, in 2012/13.

(AQW 25699/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has provided funding in the South Down Constituency as follows:

- (i) Single Farm Payment (SFP) worth £21.13 million has been paid in respect of the 2012 SFP Scheme year.
- (ii) The funding provided through the Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance (LFACA) in 2013 was £1.43 million. This funding was claimed on the 2012 Single Application Form for a qualifying period in 2012.
- (iii) Funding provided through the Rural Development Programme is £5.1 million. The details of the funding are provided in the attached table. This excludes LFACA and NICMS funding which are provided in (ii) and (iv).
- (iv) NICMS payments worth £282,100 have been paid in respect of the 2012 NICMS scheme year.

AQW 25699/11-15: Detail of the funding provided by through the Rural Development Programme in the South Down Constituency from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013

Priority	Measure	Name	Total (£)
Axis 1	1.1 Vocational training and Information Actions	Farm Family Options – Business Mentoring	8,750
		Supply Chain Development (Training)	1,792
	1.2 Adding value to agricultural and forestry products and improving market capability	Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme	345,365
	1.3 Modernisation of agricultural holdings	Farm Modernisation Programme	538,170
		Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme Tranche 2	20,000
	1.4 Supply chain development programme	Supply Chain Development (Non-training)	13,708
Axis 1 total			927,785

Priority	Measure	Name	Total (£)
Axis 2*	2.2 Agri-environment Programme (Excluding NICMS).	Countryside Management Scheme, Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme, Organic Farming Scheme, Habitat Improvement Scheme, Countryside Access Scheme	1,057,075
	2.3 First Afforestation (Forest expansion)	Woodland Grant Scheme, Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, Sustainable Forestry Operations Grant Scheme.	63,000
	2.4 Forest Environments		
Axis 2 Total (excluding LFACA and NICMS)			1,120,075

Priority	Measure	Name	Total (£)
Axis 3	3.1: Diversification into non-agricultural activities		445,467
	3.2: Business creation and development		357,880
	3.3: Encouragement of tourist activities		1,195,924
	3.4: Basic services for the economy and rural population		1,003,937
	3.5: village renewal and development		44,850
	3.6: conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage		18,434
Axis 3 total			3,066,492
Rural Development Programme total (excluding LFACA and NICMS)			5,114,352

* Funding for Measure 2.1 Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowances (LFACA) Scheme and NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) are provided in parts (ii) and (iv) respectively of the written ans

Single Farm Payment: Advance Payments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the significance that Europe places on advanced payments of the 2013 Single Payment Scheme, why local farmers are unable to access advanced payments. (AQW 25737/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Many European Paying Agencies do not make advance payments. In order to be able to make advance payments, all checks on the Single Farm Payment claims submitted to verify that eligibility conditions have been met have to be finalised.

In 2013, DARD is introducing significant changes to its controls, including the deployment of a new mapping system and ensuring its integration with on-the-spot inspections, including control with remote sensing. For these reasons, DARD will not be able to introduce the changes needed to be in a position to make advance payments in October.

I am looking to pay as many farmers as possible early in December and I will be announcing a more detailed payment timetable in November.

Single Farm Payment: Advance Payments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the 2013 Single Payment Scheme, to detail (i) why her Department is not in a position to make advanced payments; and (ii) when an advanced payment (a) can; and (b) cannot be paid. (AQW 25738/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) I am committed to ensuring that DARD is in a position to make advance payments and the work that is currently underway in regard to audit compliance should contribute significantly to that objective. My immediate focus has been to ensure that DARD's controls are compliant with EU requirements in order to bring down financial correction. In doing this, I also want to ensure that as many farmers as possible receive their payments in early December 2013. I know that that is an important priority for farming representatives too.

Increased use of control with remote sensing and greater use of online facilities by claimants have the potential to allow us to complete our validation processes earlier and make faster, earlier payments to all claimants, including inspected cases. For 2013, the focus has to be on ensuring the new LPIS mapping control and associated inspections work effectively, together with consolidating the improvements in the timeliness payments on inspected cases. It is not possible to complete the necessary controls sufficiently early to allow advance payments in 2013.

- (ii) The EU Regulations allow for payments to be made from 1 December each year. If a Member State wishes to make an advance payment it has to apply to the Commission for derogation to do so. Payments, regardless of whether these are advances or within the December payment window, cannot be made until all administrative and on-the-spot checks have been completed. In practice, an advance payment can usually be made to the majority of farmers when inspection controls in the field are completed before the advance payment is made, but advance payments cannot be made to individual farmers, such as inspection cases, until all administrative and on-the-spot controls have been completed that relate to that claimant.

Rural Development Programme: Renewable Energy

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to seek a relaxation of the EU state aid rules to allow applicants of the Rural Development Programme, Farm diversification 3.1 measure, to use some of the energy generated for their own energy requirements when constructing renewable generation installations instead of being required to sell the energy produced to a third party.

(AQW 25739/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Firstly can I point out that it is not state aid rules that prevent energy from 3.1 Farm Diversification projects being used to reduce the running costs of the farm. When my officials obtained agreement that stand alone renewable energy projects could be supported under the Axis 3 measures the Commission specified that a farm business diversifying into the sale of renewable energy could only be supported providing 100% of the output is sold to the grid and none is used to reduce farm or farm household running costs. Such activity belongs under Axis 1 the competitiveness of the farm, and renewables was not included in the programme submitted by DARD.

There may be opportunities going forward under the new programme and I would encourage you to respond to the ongoing consultation exercise highlighting this issue.

Ballykelly: Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQO 4511/11-15, when the four Equality Impact Assessments on relocation projects will be published.

(AQW 25752/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As I indicated in my letter to you dated 10th September 2013, the formal consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment for Ballykelly is complete.

Consultation on the equality screening of the other relocations has taken place with the Equality Commission and Trade Union side is currently considering the screening documents. I expect the full EQIA report to be published before the end of the year.

Single Farm Payment: Advance Payments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail why her Department will not be able to take advantage of the EU's approval for advance payments in October 2013 under the Single Farm Payment Scheme; and why the necessary administrative measures were not put in place.

(AQW 25763/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to ensuring that DARD is in a position to make advance payments and the work that is currently underway in regard to audit compliance should contribute significantly to that objective. My immediate focus has been to ensure that DARD's controls are compliant with EU requirements in order to bring down financial correction. In doing this, I also want to ensure that as many farmers as possible receive their payments in early December 2013. I know that that is an important priority for farming representatives too.

Increased use of control with remote sensing and greater use of online facilities by claimants have the potential to allow us to complete our validation processes earlier and make faster, earlier payments to all claimants, including inspected cases. For 2013, the focus has to be on ensuring the new LPIS mapping control and associated inspections work effectively, together with consolidating the improvements in the timeliness payments on inspected cases. It is not possible to complete the necessary controls sufficiently early to allow advance payments in 2013.

Dog Collars

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to review the current legal requirement for dogs to wear a collar and identifying tag at all times in a public place.

(AQW 25881/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The control of dogs here is governed by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The requirement for dogs to wear collar tags is set out in the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012.

Prior to making the 2012 Regulations my Department consulted all Councils on the need to retain the requirement for identification to be worn on a dog's collar in addition to the new requirement for the dog to be microchipped. At that time the majority of Councils preferred to keep both systems running in parallel for the first few years and to review the requirement for collar tags after the microchipping requirement had a chance to become established. Councils advised that the dog licence identification, commonly referred to as a tag, quickly provided visual identification of a dog when a microchip scanner is not available. In addition it could, for example, facilitate the return of a lost dog without the need for the intervention of a dog warden. Furthermore, a warden on patrol can see that a dog appears to be unlicensed where a collar with a tag is absent.

Schedule 8 of the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012 sets out the shape, dimensions and colour of tags up until 31 December 2014. I intend reviewing the policy on dog tags next year and subsequent proposals will be subject to consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Test, Vaccinate and Release

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 25475/11-15, what impact the total land area ineligible for surveying will have on the Test, Vaccinate and Release (TVR) Scheme.
(AQW 25882/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The total land area, which is ineligible for badger sett surveying in the Banbridge and Castletwellan areas, is expected to have a minimal impact. Ineligible land in both these areas is non-agricultural land, such as roads and land with buildings.

The badger sett survey is an important preparatory phase, which will help to inform the design of the proposed test and vaccinate or remove (TVR) wildlife intervention research.

It is important that the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) are given permission to conduct a badger sett survey on as much of the eligible land within these areas as possible. To date, 74% of the area between Banbridge and Rathfriland and 61% of the area around Castletwellan has already been surveyed.

My officials have again written to invite landowners in those areas who have not as yet given permission to become involved in this survey. Surveying will begin again later this autumn. I would encourage invited landowners to join the study and return their permission slip in the pre-paid envelope provided as soon as possible.

I have been very pleased within the level of farmer co-operation that we have already received and I hope that this support will continue.

Common Agricultural Policy: Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail each contact she has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to the allocation of Common Agricultural Policy funding, including (i) dates; and (ii) method of communication.
(AQW 25885/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Over the course of the past two years, I have had direct discussions with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on some thirteen separate occasions covering all aspects of CAP Reform, including budgetary matters. Given the nature and breadth of these discussions, it is not possible to be specific about the precise content of each of these interactions. I have also written to the Secretary of State on a number of occasions covering CAP Reform issues, including budgetary matters

DARD: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.
(AQW 25890/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since 2007, DARD Ministers have attended 17 North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Sectoral meetings (in Agriculture and Aquaculture format); 11 NSMC Plenary meetings; and 2 British Irish Council meetings (BIC).

The figures below relate to meetings at Ministerial level in the current Assembly mandate (May 2011 to date) outside the remit of the NSMC and BIC.

Meetings with:	Number of Meetings:
Counterparts in Britain	21
Counterparts in the rest of Ireland	7

The information requested for meetings at official level is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Strategies, Development Plans and Implementation Plans

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many (i) strategies (ii) development plans; and (iii) implementation plans exist within her Department; and to detail the number of recommendations in each.

(AQW 25901/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The following figures relate to the core Department and its Agencies and provide information on external-facing strategies, development and implementation plans which are currently active and/or awaiting the implementation of recommendations:-

Category	Number	No. of Recommendations
Strategies	8	55
Development Plans	1	26
Implementation Plans	9	169

A number of these initiatives contain actions, other than "recommendations", and these are not included in the figures above, e.g. aims, targets, key activities and measures.

The figures given above exclude the Going for Growth report developed by the industry-led Agri-Food Strategy Board. A draft government response to this report is currently under development and will be brought to the Executive in the near future for agreement on the way ahead.

Rural Development Programme: Organic Farming

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why organic farming will not be funded under the Rural Development Programme.

(AQW 25955/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Proposals for the next Rural Development Programme (RDP) include a range of funding and support measures which are suitable for organic farmers as well as conventional farmers.

The RDP consultation proposes that no scheme to fund conversion to organic production methods be offered within the next Programme. This proposal is based on the fact that uptake for the 2007-2013 organic farming conversion scheme in the current programme has been limited, with 37 farmers participating.

Current economic conditions and a limited premium for organic produce have meant that in recent years the sector has contracted. A significant number of organic farmers have reverted to conventional production, including some of those encouraged into organic production through the organic farming conversion scheme. This indicates that there is currently insufficient demand for such a conversion scheme in the next RDP.

The Agri-Environment Scheme in the current RDP provides funding for organic farming through an Organic Management Option. This annual maintenance payment recognises the environmental benefit associated with organic farming. Inclusion of a similar measure within the next RDP is under consideration.

Social Farming Across Borders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has had discussions with Social Farming Across Borders; and to outline the plans in place to further develop these projects.

(AQW 25965/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am familiar with the Social Farming Across Borders project and spoke at the event to mark its official launch in September 2012. My Department is supporting this initiative financially through the INTERREG IVA Programme and also through the involvement of DARD representatives on the project's Steering Committee. The outputs and impact of the project will be fully evaluated when it completes in late 2014 and this will inform plans for future social farming activity across the region.

Agrienvironment Scheme: Advice and Training

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the next Agri-Environment Scheme, how training and advice will be incorporated to be of use to the farmer and the environment.

(AQW 25980/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The new agri-environment scheme is currently under development and will form part of the 2007-2014 Rural Development Plan. It is envisaged that both training and advice will be important features of the final scheme. The nature of how training and advice will be incorporated into the scheme is currently a matter for consultation. This will inform how best to help farmers implement their scheme agreements to benefit the environment.

Central Investigation Service: Families Acting for Innocent Relatives

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 25282/11-15, whether the Central Investigation Service made the recommendation to the Special EU Programmes Body to refer the matter to the PSNI to take forward an investigation.

(AQW 25988/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Central Investigation Service (CIS) recommendation to the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) was to seek PSNI advice on the auditor's report.

Horses: Traffic Accidents

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is working with the equestrian community to prevent road traffic accidents involving horses.

(AQW 26020/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department works with the equestrian community through the training and support provided by the Equine Team at CAFRE, including Riding and Road Safety courses for new entrants to the equine industry.

Fishing Fleet: Financial Support

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the level of support that is currently available to the fishing fleet.

(AQO 4704/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The main means of supporting the fishing fleet is the European Fisheries Fund. Under this fund £6.74 million has been committed to measures that support the fishing fleet, with £5.13 million of this spent to date. A further £2.33 million remains available for fishing fleet related measures.

In addition, during 2013 I have separately released funding worth approximately £500,000 to assist vessels with harbour and landing fees as part of a package of measures aimed at assisting the fleet to adapt to requirements arising from reform of the common fisheries policy and difficult fishing conditions at the start of this year.

My Department also funds a significant programme of fisheries research and data collection through the Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute. This programme includes assessments of fish stocks to support European negotiations to maintain or increase the fleet's fishing opportunities.

DARD also avails of financial assistance through European Community financial measures for the implementation of the common fisheries policy. This finance makes a significant contribution in terms of reducing the cost to the fleet of complying with European fisheries control rules. Examples of support under these measures includes funding for electronic logbooks and vessel monitoring systems that are required by under the European fisheries control programme.

Single Farm Payment: Advance Payments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why farmers are unable to access advanced payments under the Single Farm Payment Scheme.

(AQO 4700/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD has introduced significant changes to its controls this year, including the deployment of a new mapping system and ensuring its integration with on-the-spot inspections, including control with remote sensing. For these reasons, DARD will not be able to introduce the changes needed to be in a position to make advance payments in October.

I would re-emphasise that I am committed to ensuring that DARD is in a position to make advance payments in future years. Many European Paying Agencies do not make advance payments but I remain hopeful that increased use of control with remote sensing by the Department and more online applications by farmers will help us complete our validation processes earlier which in turn will increase the scope for us to make advance payments in future years.

For this year, I am looking to pay as many farmers as possible early in December and I will be announcing a more detailed payment timetable in November.

Cattle: Missing/Stolen

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the number of cattle reported as missing or stolen.

(AQO 4691/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The theft or disappearance of any cattle can be a significant financial loss for any herd keeper and can also cause great emotional distress. Whilst the number of cattle reported as missing or stolen is disappointingly high it should be noted that there are approximately 1,500,000 cattle registered in NI and the number of cattle that are reported as missing or stolen each year represents 0.20% of the total herd.

Keepers are obliged to report lost or stolen cattle to my Department, and when they do so, the ear tag numbers are removed from the keeper's herd list on the APHIS database. This process ensures that animals identified with those ear tag numbers cannot be presented for sale or slaughter for human consumption, which gives us assurances of effective traceability across the food chain.

Any suspicion of illegal movements of cattle or illegal dumping of animal carcasses is treated very seriously by my Department and investigated thoroughly with other relevant central and local government departments. The PSNI actively investigate reports of stolen cattle.

I would encourage any keeper who suspects that an animal has been stolen to report it to the PSNI as soon as possible so that a full investigation can be carried out.

Single Farm Payment: Advance Payments

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to allow local farmers to receive upfront payments from the Single Farm Payment Scheme, as agreed recently in Brussels.

(AQO 4695/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The European Commission has agreed to allow any Member State that is in a position to do so to make up to 50% advance payments from 16 October 2013. Many Member states do not do so, but some do, including the south of Ireland.

I am committed to ensuring that DARD is in a position to make advance payments in future years and the work that I have carried out in order to improve the Department's key controls in regard to Single Farm Payment is designed to put the Department in a position to be able to achieve this at the earliest opportunity.

For 2013, the focus must be to ensure the new LPIS mapping control and associated inspections work effectively and also to consolidate the improvements in the timeliness of payments on inspected cases that were achieved last year. For this reason, it is not possible to complete the necessary controls sufficiently early to allow advance payments in 2013.

Increased use of control with remote sensing by the Department and more online applications by farmers will help us complete our validation processes earlier which in turn will increase the scope for us to make advance payments in future years.

Birds of Prey

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why there have been long delays in providing the results of the tests on birds of prey which have been found dead in suspicious circumstances.[R]

(AQO 4696/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute's (AFBI) Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD) carries out post-mortem examinations on carcasses of wild animals submitted under the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme. The primary purpose of the scheme is to investigate potential poisoning of animals by chemicals used in agriculture.

Until December 2012, AFBI carried out the chemical analysis for poisons, as well as the post-mortem examinations, when required. Since then, due to the specialised nature of the testing and the high cost / low volume of submissions, AFBI has sent samples to the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency (SASA) in Edinburgh. This approach is more cost effective and is aimed at reducing turnaround times. Test results from the SASA are normally available within three to four months.

I am aware that recently there was a delay in receiving the results of toxicology testing of a Red Kite carcass submitted to VSD by the PSNI. This was due to an administrative error within VSD. The result has since been reported to the PSNI and internal systems have been reviewed within VSD to prevent recurrence of the delay in reporting. No poisons were detected in this sample.

I am advised that VSD's average turnaround time for a first report on the post-mortem of wild birds during the financial year 2012/13 was two days.

Single Farm Payment: Advance Payments

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Northern Ireland will not be eligible to act on the agreement reached at Brussels which allows for an advance 50 per cent contribution to be made under the 2013 Single Farm Payment Scheme.

(AQO 4702/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For 2013 my Department's the focus is ensuring the new LPIS mapping control and associated inspections work effectively together and that we continue to improve the timeliness of payments on inspected cases. For this reason, it is not possible to complete the necessary controls sufficiently early to allow advance payments in 2013.

I remain committed to ensuring that DARD is in a position to make advance payments in future years and the work that is currently underway in regard to audit compliance should contribute significantly to that objective I also want to ensure that as many farmers as possible receive their payments in early December 2013. I know that that is an important priority for farming representatives too.

Single Farm Payment: Review of Decisions

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Single Farm Payment Review of Decisions procedure.

(AQO 4703/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Single Farm Payment Review of Decisions procedure is a two stage process. Stage 1 involves a review of the decision by an officer within the Department who has not previously been involved in the case, while Stage 2 involves a review by an External Panel. The Panel consider the Department's decision against the EU regulations and agreed Policy and make a recommendation. The Panel's recommendation is not binding on the Department. The final decision rests with the Head of the Paying Agency for the Department.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Foyle Cup

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why the Sport Northern Ireland Events Programme is not yet open for applications and what support in the absence of this programme, her Department can give to the Foyle Cup.

(AQW 23834/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Primary responsibility for providing support and funding to events, including sporting events such as the Foyle Cup, transferred in 2010 to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). I understand that the Foyle Cup has been supported by DETI since then through the NI Tourist Board. Having said that, my Department has approved a one year pilot Sports Events Funding Programme which was launched by Sport NI on 18 June 2013, with a closing date of 2 August 2013 for applications to be submitted.

During this current financial year (2013/14), the Foyle Cup received £20,000 through the Culture Company and the 2013 City of Culture programme. In addition, following a successful bid in the June Monitoring Round, an additional £10,000 each has been provided for the 2013 Foyle Cup and 2013 Milk Cup tournaments.

Welfare Reform

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of how Welfare Reform will impact on the aims and objectives of her Department.

(AQW 24263/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion is the top priority of my Department and its arm's-length bodies. Programmes and interventions are designed to promote social inclusion and to tackle inequalities in deprived areas, particularly the sectors of greatest inequality in the areas of greatest objective need. Any impacts from Welfare Reform will be addressed in that context.

Programme for Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the progress made on each of her Department's Programme for Government commitments.

(AQW 25289/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Progress DCAL's Programme for Government commitments is detailed below:

To support 200 projects through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund

To date 98 projects have been supported and letters of offer were issued over summer 2013 to a further 50 projects with several more currently being finalised. There will be a further round of funding opening in January 2014 which is expected to bring the total number of projects supported by the Fund to at least 200 by March 2015.

To develop sports stadiums as agreed with the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby

Ravenhill – The project is on target. Two stands have been completed and the construction contract is on target for completion by September 2014.

Windsor Park - The project is on target. Completion of the construction works is anticipated by June 2015.

Casement Park – The project is on target. A planning application was submitted in June 2013 and the construction work is expected to be completed by September 2015.

To host the World Police and Fire Games in 2013

The Games were successfully hosted in August 2013.

Bushmills Salmon Station: Recruitment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 24353/11-15, for an update on the recruitment of two full-time employees.

(AQW 25358/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) have recently recruited two new permanent Assistant Scientific Officer (ASO) posts to the Bushmills Salmon Station during July 2013. These staff were recruited to AFBI during the recent external ASO recruitment process and were subsequently assigned to Bushmills, based on their skills and experience.

Staff: Suspended on Full Pay

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) number of departmental staff that have been suspended on full pay; and (ii) the duration of the suspension in each case.

(AQW 25442/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are currently no departmental staff within DCAL who have been suspended on full pay.

Sport Northern Ireland: Capital Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the average length of time between Sport Northern Ireland agreeing a capital grant to a sports club and the release of funds.

(AQW 25485/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Currently Sport NI is distributing capital grant through the Sports Matters Capital Programme. I have been informed by Sport NI that the average time between the date of a letter of offer to an applicant to this programme and the date of first payment is 82 days. This period includes time for: the applicant to complete a formal acceptance of the offer; issuing of a permission to proceed letter; and mobilisation for a contractor on site. From that point, the contractor produces monthly invoices, which are certified by the design team and submitted by the applicant to Sport NI with their claim for payment of grant against eligible works.

Sport Northern Ireland: Capital Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how many capital grants have been provided by Sport Northern Ireland (i) with security; and (ii) without security, from the sports club or organisation receiving the grant, in the last three years.

(AQW 25486/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI has approved 236 capital awards to sports clubs or organisations in the last three financial years, from 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2013. Of these, 20 have had a security condition placed on the award, and 216 have had no security condition placed on the award.

Sport Northern Ireland: Capital Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether a sports club that has been awarded a grant by Sports Northern Ireland on the basis of providing security, can then apply for another capital grant.

(AQW 25488/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A sports club that has been awarded a grant by Sport NI on the basis of providing security can apply for another capital grant.

Sport Northern Ireland: Capital Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of cases in which Sport Northern Ireland have issued a grant on the basis of security from a sports club and have then reclaimed the grant from the security of the asset.

(AQW 25489/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI has never had to invoke a security condition of award to reclaim grant.

Creative Industries: Employment and GVA

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the contributions from local creative industries to (i) employment; and (ii) Gross Value Added compared to the rest of the UK, for every year since 2007.

(AQW 25549/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which produces the UK Creative Industries Economic Estimates, is currently reviewing the classification and measurement of the Creative Industries. When this review is complete, DCMS plans to release revised statistics. DCAL will subsequently release updated statistics for the north of Ireland.

The most recent available data for the north of Ireland is detailed below. Employment data prior to 2009 is not comparable as a result of the updating of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes from SIC 2003 to SIC 2007.

Employment

	NI		UK	
	Employment	% of NI employment	Employment	% of UK employment
2009	21,000	2.8	1,443,338	4.99
2010	N/A	N/A	1,498,173	5.14

Estimates for the north of Ireland and the UK are not directly comparable as they are produced using different methodologies. Due to small survey sample sizes in the Labour Force Survey in the north of Ireland, the DCAL methodology uses a combination of the Labour Force Survey and the Census of Employment. The UK figures are taken from the Annual Population Survey.

Gross Value Added

	NI		UK	
	£ million	% of GVA for all industries	£ million	% of GVA for all industries
2008	436	2.5	36,600	2.82
2009	329	1.9	36,290	2.89

Figures for the north of Ireland are taken from the NI Annual Business Inquiry. UK figures are taken from the Annual Business Survey.

Data prior to 2008 is not comparable as a result of the updating of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes from SIC 2003 to SIC 2007.

Helen's Tower and Somme Heritage Centre

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department is helping to promote the newly opened Helen's Tower and Somme Museum site.

(AQW 25555/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Helen's Tower is under the ownership of the Irish Landmark Trust and falls outside of my Department's remit. My Department has not been approached for assistance to help promote the Tower.

The Somme Heritage Centre (also known as the Somme Museum) is currently being funded by my Department. In support of the Decade of Centenaries I have approved £79k of funding for the Centre, over three years, to develop an educational programme linked to the First World War and the Battle of the Somme.

Foras na Gaeilge and Boord o Ulstèr Scots: Salary Reduction

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any reduction of the salaries of Foras na Gaeilge and/or The Boord o Ulstèr Scots' officers who are employed in the Belfast offices, in each financial year since 2008.

(AQW 25558/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There has been no reduction in the salaries of Foras na Gaeilge officers employed in the Belfast office since 2008.

Two members of staff in the Ulster-Scots Agency have reduced their working hours from 37 to 30 hrs per week. This will result in a saving of £17k by December 2013.

Foras na Gaeilge and Boord o Ulstèr Scots: Downgrading of Posts

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how many posts in the Belfast offices of Foras na Gaeilge and the Boord o Ulstèr Scots have been downgraded, in each year since 2008.

(AQW 25561/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No posts have been downgraded in the Belfast Offices of either Foras na Gaeilge or the Ulster-Scots Agency since 2008.

Foras na Gaeilge: Core Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in respect of organisations that are core-funded by Foras na Gaeilge to detail (i) the number of posts directly funded in the local organisations with related grades and salary scales; and (ii) the number of posts directly funded by organisations in the rest of Ireland with related grades and salary scales.

(AQW 25564/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A breakdown of the staff by numbers and grades is shown below for each of the organisations core funded by Foras na Gaeilge.

Northern Core Funded Bodies

Altram (7): Part-time Managers x 2 (Deputy Principal Equivalent); Staff Officer x 4; Administrative Assistant. Pay is linked to NI Civil Service [NICS] pay scales

Áisaonad (5): Senior Lecturers x 3; Grade 5; Grade 4 (part-time). Pay linked to Universities and Colleges employers Association scales.

Comhaltas Uladh (0): The organisation is run on a voluntary basis and receives funding for projects.

Forbairt Feirste (3): Director (National Joint Council NJC Scale PO5); Irish Language Business Officer (NJC6 Scale); Administrative Officer (part-time) (NJC3 Scale)

Iontaobhas Ultach (4): Director (NJC Scale PO3); Deputy Director (NJC Scale PO3); Cross-Community/Development Officer (SO1-PO3 NJC Scale); Secretary (282 SSO 1 Scale)

Pobal (4): Chief Executive (NJC PO8 Scale); Development Officer x 2 (SO 193 Scale); Finance, Personnel & Administrative Office (EOII 289 Scale).

Raidió Fáilte (2): Director (Staff Officer 249); Development/Marketing Officer (Staff Officer 193) [NICS Scales]

Southern Corefunded Bodies

Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge (3): Assistant Principal Officer (part-time); Executive Officer (part-time); Executive Officer (Maternity Leave). [Irish Civil Service Scales]

Comhdháil Naisiúnta na Gaeilge (8): Director (equivalent to Assistant Principal, Ordinary Scale); Marketing & Communications Manager (equivalent to Higher Executive Officer, Ordinary Scale); Administrative & Personnel Executive (Staff Officer, Local Authorities' Scale); Corporate Development Executive (equivalent to Executive Officer, Ordinary Scale); Projects' Executive (equivalent to Executive Officer, Ordinary Scale); Legislation & Planning Executive (Equivalent to Executive Officer, Ordinary Scale); Clerical Officer (Grade 3 Clerical Officer, Local Authorities' Scale); Receptionist (Clerical Officer). [Irish Civil Service Scales except where otherwise indicated]

An Comhlachas Naisiúnta Drámaíochta (2): Director (equivalent to Assistant Principal Officer); Executive Assistant (equivalent to Executive Officer). [Irish Civil Service Scales]

Comhlúadar (3): Higher Executive Officer; Executive Officer x 2. [Civil Service Scales]

Conradh na Gaeilge (6): Secretary General (equivalent to Assistant Principal Officer); Deputy Secretary General (equivalent to Higher Executive Officer); Development and Office Executive (equivalent to Executive Officer); Publications' Executive (equivalent to Higher Executive Officer); Financial Executive (equivalent to Administrative Officer); Receptionist (equivalent to Clerical Officer). [Irish Civil Service scales]

Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (2): Assistant Principal Officer; Executive Officer. [Irish Civil Service Scales]

Gael Linn (6): Manager x 2; Officer x 2; Administrator x 2. [Own organisational scale]

Gaelscoileanna (5): Assistant Principal Officer; Higher Executive Officer; Executive Officer x 2; Clerical Officer. [Irish Civil Service Scales]

Glór na nGael (6): Director (equivalent to Senior Executive Officer, Local Authorities' Scale); Manager (Higher Executive Officer, Local Authorities' Scales); Development Officer x 3 (equivalent to Executive Officer); Administrator (equivalent to Clerical Officer). [Irish Civil Service Scales except where otherwise indicated]

Oireachtas na Gaeilge (4): Director (equivalent to Assistant Principal Officer); Administrator (equivalent to Higher Executive Officer, Higher Scale); Development Officer (equivalent to Executive Officer); Executive (equivalent to Administrative Officer). [Irish Civil Service Scales]

Raidió na Life (4): Station Manager (equivalent to Executive Officer, Higher Scale); Technician (equivalent to Executive Officer, Ordinary Scale); Controller of Programmes (equivalent to Executive Officer, Ordinary Scale). [Irish Civil Service Scales]

Foras na Gaeilge: Redundancy in Core-funded Bodies

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to organisations that are core-funded by Foras na Gaeilge, to detail the total number and proportion of post-holders the organisations in each jurisdiction must make redundant by the end of June 2014 in order to comply with the conditions attached to the new funding arrangements, which the North South Ministerial Council in Language format approved on 10 July 2013.

(AQW 25565/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The decision taken at the NSMC meeting on 10 July 2013 did not require Foras na Gaeilge to make anyone redundant. Issues of employment and redundancy are matters for the individual employing organisations involved.

Fishing Loughs: Antisocial Behaviour

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action will be taken to discourage swimming and anti-social behaviour at departmental-maintained fishing loughs (a) to ensure permit holders can fish in the appropriate environment; and (b) in the interests of safety.

(AQW 25570/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Public Angling Estate is an important community asset providing accessible and affordability angling for everyone. It is important that people using these waters set a good example in standards of sportsmanship, care for the environment, safety and show consideration to fellow anglers and other water users. The Department promotes an Anglers Code of Conduct through its Angling Guide to encourage such standards and discourage behaviour which may interfere with the enjoyment of all those using the waters.

My officials also work closely with the other agencies in promoting safety around water. The Department has a link on its angling website to the NI Direct website on the dangers of swimming and safety in general around water.

The Departments fisheries protection officers also carry out regularly patrols and may involve the PSNI in dealing with any incidents of anti social behaviour detected.

Fishing Licences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many fishing licences have been applied for, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 25607/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below details the number of DCAL fishing licenses issued in the last three years for which records are complete:

Angling licenses:

Type of Licence	2010	2011	2012
Game Season	8143	7381	7329
Foyle Endorsement	638	682	694
Coarse Season	2603	2277	2763
Disabled Licence Game	1795	1739	1701
Disabled Licence Coarse	132	151	134
Game Senior Citizens	4489	4448	4786
Game Juvenile	2261	2114	2138
Game 14 Day	54	89	45
Game 3 Day	685	675	637
Coarse Senior Citizens	237	216	292
Coarse Juvenile	525	464	552
Coarse 14 Day	67	37	46
Coarse 3 Day	347	374	412
Joint Coarse 14 Day	996	1011	1248
Joint Coarse 3 Day	1015	907	1169
Joint Game 14 Day	334	334	380
Joint Game 3 Day	2172	2312	3185

Commercial Licenses:

Type of Licence	2010	2011	2012
Eel Long line <1200hooks	79	93	86
Eel Draft	37	38	45
Eel Long line >1200hooks	2	2	9
Draft net	16	20	21

Type of Licence	2010	2011	2012
Trammel net (yards)	11,400	10,400	12,600
Trammel net (Coarse) (yards)	46,300	56,700	64,500
Bait net	44	50	70
Tidal Drift net	2	2	2
Tidal Draft net	2	2	2
Bag net	2	2	0

Angling Licences

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she ensures that people who lose their angling licence as a result of breaches of the licence or illegal fishing activity cannot purchase a new licence.

(AQW 25613/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department or the courts may, in exceptional circumstances, revoke an angling licence or impose a ban on an individual holding a licence.

In the case of a licence being revoked or a ban imposed, the Department would provide licence distributors with the details of the individual and instruct them not to issue a licence.

Should a distributor issue the person with a licence it would be deemed invalid.

Cricket: Female Participation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department plans to support and promote the uptake of cricket by females.

(AQW 25687/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for supporting and promoting the uptake of cricket by females rests, in the first instance, with the governing body for the sport, Cricket Ireland. That said, my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, identifies a number of high level targets aimed at increasing participation rates in sport generally, including amongst females. To help achieve these targets, Sport NI has provided £1,118,870 funding over the last five years to assist with the development of cricket and help increase participation rates. Examples of programmes funded include Awards for Sport and Active Communities, both of which encourage females to take up cricket as a sport.

Cricket: Funding for Women

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial support has been provided to women's cricket in each of the last five years.

(AQW 25689/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: During the last five years, Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, has provided funding totalling £1,118,870 to the sport of cricket, including women's cricket.

The details are broken down as follows: -

Programme	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Governing Body Plans	£69,978	-	-	-	-
Investing in Performance Sport	-	£144,202	£174,148	£212,007	£196,082
Programme	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Active Communities	-	-	£83,983	£99,543	£96,693
Awards for Sport	-	£42,234 provided for the period 2009-2012			-

Sailing: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of financial support provided to sailing, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 25789/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: During the last five years, up to 31 March 2013, Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, has provided Exchequer and Lottery funding to sailing totalling £1,872,594. A breakdown of funding provided in each year is detailed in the table below: -

Financial Year	Exchequer	Lottery	Grand Total
2008/09	£95,859	£502,946	£598,805
2009/10	£531,765	£61,335	£593,100
2010/11	£278,050	£21,743	£299,793
2011/12	£152,741	£26,102	£178,843
2012/13	£115,292	£86,761	£202,053
Grand Total	£1,173,707	£698,887	£1,872,594

Belfast Lough: Water Sports

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are plans to develop Belfast Lough for water sports. (AQW 25811/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the development of Belfast Lough is a matter, in the first instance, for the Department of the Environment. I am not aware of any plans to develop Belfast Lough for water sports.

Large-scale Events

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the success of UK City of Culture events in Londonderry and the World Police and Fire Games 2013, what consideration is being given to hosting additional large scale events from 2014.

(AQW 25867/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The World Police and Fire Games were a tremendous showcase of what we have to offer in the North of Ireland and I am committed to taking forward new initiatives inspired by the Games to create a lasting legacy and positively impact the lives of local people.

DCAL officials are currently considering which other events could be held in the North.

As we approach the end of the year and the cultural programme of events, the focus for the City of Culture is focussing on promoting equality and longer term benefits, particularly those sectors and areas facing greatest objective need. Targets to increase jobs, investment and wages and to improve perceptions, quality of life and opportunities have been developed to address specific need in the City up to 2020.

As part of the focus on legacy, we are working with project partners to consider which aspects of the programme were successful and may return to the city in the future. I am committed to ensuring that major events such as the Tattoo and Fleadh return to the North of Ireland in the future. My Department will play a leading role in the delivery of City of Culture legacy.

We have demonstrated that we can host major international events in the North which will allow us to bid with confidence for future events.

Ulster Fleadh Cheoil 2013: Economic Value

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the economic value of the Ulster Fleadh Cheoil 2013 to the (i) Dromore community; (ii) Co. Tyrone; and (iii) Co. Fermanagh.

(AQW 25884/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that specific details regarding the economic value for the Ulster Fleadh Cheoil 2013 to the Dromore community, Co. Tyrone, or Co. Fermanagh is not yet available as an Economic and Social Study is still in the process of being prepared.

However, I am informed that the organisers estimate that there were 25,000+ visitors to the Fleadh, including tourists from across Europe, North America and further afield. I also understand that local businesses, particularly those in the hospitality industry, in the Dromore, Tyrone and areas close by in Fermanagh have reported well improved business results leading up to and during the Fleadh.

DCAL: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 25888/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There have been 15 sectoral meetings of the NSMC in Language format and 13 in Waterways format since May 2007.

Usually in advance of each of these meetings officials from relevant Departments would meet to agree logistics, draft agendas and draft papers.

Since May 2007 there have been 20 British Irish Council meetings in relation to indigenous language work stream at official level and two at Ministerial level. There has also been four seminars at which officials were present.

Sport: Post-primary Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many post-primary schools provide competitive teams in (i) football; (ii) gaelic sports; (iii) cricket; (iv) rugby; and (v) tennis.

(AQW 25905/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for sport in post-primary schools is a matter for the Department of Education. Neither my Department, nor Sport NI, hold details on post-primary school competitive sporting teams.

Inland Waterways: Mooring

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the geographical location of the 368 metres of mooring recently developed by Inland Waterways.

(AQW 25991/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The breakdown of the 368 metres of additional moorings reported by Waterways Ireland at the NSMC Inland Waterways meeting on the 19 June 2013 is as follows:

- 350m at Lowtown Harbour, Grand Canal; and
- 18m at 24th Lock Gate, Grand Canal.

A further 60 metres have been completed at Coosan Point on the Shannon Navigation. Waterways Ireland plan to complete 470 metres of additional moorings around Lough Erne. Projects at Knockninny and Galloon await planning permission. Works at Camagh Bay are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2013 and the tender for works to provide additional moorings at Crom is due to close on the 3 October.

Recruitment: Religious Breakdown

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number and percentage of (i) Protestants; (ii) Roman Catholics; and (c) Non-determined applicants and appointees to her Department, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26139/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The NICS produces an Annual Report on Recruitment each year which is in the public domain. It provides a summary on recruitment in all NICS Departments, including DCAL. The most recent data available is for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012. The report includes summary data and analysis of recruitment provided by the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA). It can be accessed at

<https://irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net/pages/content.aspx?Page=annual-reports>

Reports for previous years can also be accessed using the same link.

The majority of external recruitment to DCAL is done via volume, corporate led competitions whereby individuals apply to join the NICS rather than individual departments. Data relating to applicants and appointees to DCAL as a result of three DCAL led recruitment competitions held in the specified time frame is contained in the tables below. To protect the confidentiality of the community background of appointees, appointees from competitions in both years have been combined. Similarly, due to small numbers in the Not Determined/Protestant categories appointees in these categories have been combined.

Applicants to DCAL-specific competitions

	2011		2012	
	No.	%	No.	%
Protestant	32	35.2%	83	36.7%
Catholic	54	59.3%	116	51.3%
Not Determined	5	5.5%	27	11.9%

Appointments from DCAL-specific competitions held in 2011 and 2012

	Total	
	No.	%
Protestant/Not Determined	7	53.8%
Catholic	6	46.2%

Department of Education

Universities: Local Students

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to outline any discussions held with the British Government to ensure that any changes to secondary level qualifications do not prejudice or narrow the opportunity for university places for local students. (AQO 4564/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Michael Gove has announced a number of changes to GCSEs and A levels in England. I have written to Mr Gove expressing my concern about the pace of change and his failure to take into account that these qualifications are also offered in the north of Ireland and Wales.

The former Welsh Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews and I met with Mr Gove earlier this year to put our views to him. In spite of our concerns, Mr Gove continues to move ahead with his reforms but has accepted that more time is needed to develop the majority of GCSEs.

Comparability and portability of our qualifications are significant issues for our pupils, parents and teachers. I am determined that qualifications offered here will remain comparable to those offered in England, Wales, Scotland and the south of Ireland.

More importantly, they should be capable of standing on their own terms, capable of competing with the best educational countries in the world. As such, they will continue to be valued by universities across these islands and beyond.

Bangor Grammar School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for how much the old Bangor Grammar School site was sold. (AQW 25644/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The vested element of the old Bangor Grammar School site was sold for £1,258,200.

Part of the old Bangor Grammar School site that was sold, was occupied by the former Conor House Preparatory Department. This element of the site was not vested in the schools estate and is therefore not included in the above figure. The amount payable to the Department in clawback is £1,178,076.

DE: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many meetings have been held at (i) Ministerial level; and (ii) official level, with the corresponding Minister or Department (a) in the rest of the UK; and (b) in the Republic of Ireland since May 2007, either under the aegis of the North/South or East/West arrangements, or, otherwise. (AQW 25839/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since taking up office I have attended 1 meeting under the aegis of North/South in the south of Ireland, 1 under the aegis of East/West in England, Scotland and Wales and 1 further meeting with each with my counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales on other issues.

Officials across the Department of Education have held a large number of meetings, since my appointment, with their counterparts in London, Dublin, Cardiff and Edinburgh and continue to maintain regular contact on a wide range of issues. It is simply not possible, without incurring disproportionate costs, for this information to be extracted for the period May 2011 to date.

Free School Meals: Link with Free Music Tuition

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many pupils who are in receipt of Free School Meals receive free music tuition, broken down by (i) Education and Library Board; and (ii) school sector. (AQW 25842/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently, each Education and Library Board (ELB) organises a Music Service as part of its provision in support of education. These Music Services operate across and beyond all school sectors in both formal and informal settings.

The provision of additional music tuition for pupils who wish to learn a particular instrument is the responsibility of the Schools' Music Service of each ELB and the Chief Executive Officers of the 5 ELBs have provided the following information in relation to free music tuition and free instrument hire provided to those pupils entitled to free school meals:

BELB

Sector	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Music Tuition (Figures available for Belfast School of Music only)	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Instrument Hire (figures related to BELB schools & Belfast School of Music)
Controlled Primary	3	94
Controlled Integrated Primary	1	9
Maintained Primary	2	129
Grant Maintained Integrated Primary	1	18
Irish Medium Primary	0	7
Controlled Post Primary	3	17
Controlled Integrated Post Primary	0	2
Maintained Post Primary	2	9
Grant Maintained Integrated Post Primary	0	7
Voluntary Grammar School	6	7
Total	18	299

NEELB

Sector	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Music Tuition	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Instrument Hire
Controlled Primary	0	65
Controlled Integrated Primary	0	11
Maintained Primary	0	25
Grant Maintained Integrated Primary	0	4
Controlled Post Primary	0	3
Controlled Integrated Post Primary	0	1
Controlled Grammar School	0	3
Maintained Post Primary	0	4
Grant Maintained Integrated Post Primary	0	1
Voluntary Grammar School	0	7
Total	0	124

SEELB

Sector	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Music Tuition	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Instrument Hire
Controlled Primary	0	93
Controlled Integrated Primary	0	0
Maintained Primary	0	26
Grant Maintained Integrated Primary	0	0
Irish Medium Primary	0	0
Controlled Post Primary		8
Controlled Integrated Post Primary	0	0
Maintained Post Primary	0	2
Grant Maintained Integrated Post Primary	0	2
Voluntary Grammar School	0	0
Total	0	131

SELB

Sector	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Music Tuition	Number of Pupils Receiving Instrument Hire at a reduced rate
Controlled Primary	0	72
Controlled Integrated Primary	0	2
Maintained Primary	0	142
Grant Maintained Integrated Primary	0	6
Controlled Post Primary	0	11
Maintained Post Primary	0	19
Grant Maintained Integrated Post Primary	0	1
Voluntary Grammar School	0	17
Controlled Special	0	3
Total	0	273

WELB

Sector	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Music Tuition	Number of Pupils Receiving Free Instrument Hire
Controlled Primary	0	202
Maintained Primary	0	439
Grant Maintained Integrated Primary	0	28
Irish Medium Primary	0	11
Controlled Post Primary	0	111
Controlled Grammar	0	12
Maintained Post Primary	0	90
Grant Maintained Integrated Post Primary	0	16
Voluntary Grammar School	0	67
Total	0	976

Free School Meals: Additional benefits

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what additional benefits accrue to pupils and schools as a result of free school meals entitlement.

(AQW 25904/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Registered entitlement to Free School Meals is a key indicator used within the Common Funding Formula to distribute additional funding to schools' delegated budgets under the Targeting Social Need (TSN) factor. In the current financial year almost £66.7 million was distributed to schools under the TSN factor, of which £44.2m used free school meal entitlements as an indicator, in full or in part, of social deprivation and additional need.

Research demonstrates that there is a clear link between a healthy diet and children's concentration, behaviour and performance at school. Healthy free school meals, therefore, play an important role in addressing the particular barriers that children from lower income backgrounds face in accessing and participating fully in school life and achieving their potential.

Eligibility for free schools meals also normally brings with it an entitlement (with the exception of pupils of nursery age) to a school uniform grant under the Education and Library Boards' Clothing Allowance Scheme, as the eligibility criteria used are similar to those used for free school meals.

The Department's Extended Schools programme provides additional funding to over 490 schools that serve our most disadvantaged communities. £12 million has been provided for the programme in 2013/14. The eligibility criteria includes all schools with 37% or more Free School Meals Entitlement.

Schools: Voluntary Contributions

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the practice of schools setting deadlines and issuing reminders to both parents and pupils to pay so called voluntary contributions to help meet school costs.

(AQW 25908/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All schools are entitled to request or invite voluntary contributions from parents for the benefit of the school or any school activities.

Article 137 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, as explained in Department of Education Circular No 1991/21, makes it clear that there is no restriction or prohibition on schools requesting or inviting such voluntary contributions; however, the legislation and the guidance also specify that any such request or invitation be framed in such a way that makes it clear to parents that:

- a there is no obligation to contribute; and
- b registered pupils at the school will not be treated differently according to whether or not their parents have made a contribution in response to the request or invitation.

Pupils and their parents should not be asked why they have not paid voluntary contributions.

Schools should be mindful of the spirit as well as the letter of this legislation. Specifically, my Department recommends that:

- a the voluntary nature of contributions is highlighted in all correspondence issued by schools that requests them; and
- b the design of stationery used for billing or invoicing clearly distinguishes between any compulsory charges being levied and any voluntary component.

Primary Schools: Starting Age

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25563/11-15, whether flexibility could be made available for pupils due to start school in September 2014.

(AQW 26056/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The work on identifying potential options to introduce a degree of flexibility around the school starting age is currently ongoing and will be completed as quickly as possible. Therefore I cannot confirm at this stage if flexibility to the school starting age will be introduced for pupils due to start school in September 2014.

St Joseph's High School, Coalisland: Autism Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what is the cost per child of providing taxi service transport for qualifying children to attend St Joseph's High School Autism Unit, Coalisland.

(AQW 26071/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the Southern Education and Library Board that they provide transport assistance to eleven pupils who travel by taxi to the autism unit at St Joseph's College, Coalisland, and that the cost of providing this taxi service is £3,700 per pupil per year. These pupils travel from Armagh, Aughnacloy, Craigavon, Dungannon and Stewartstown.

St Joseph's High School, Coalisland: Autism Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many pupils who attend the autism unit in St Joseph's High School Coalisland, travel to school by a Southern Education and Library Board funded taxi; and, with the exception of pupils from Coalisland, to detail the areas from which pupils are travelling.

(AQW 26084/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the Southern Education and Library Board that they provide transport assistance to eleven pupils who travel by taxi to the autism unit at St Joseph's College, Coalisland, and that the cost of providing this taxi service is £3,700 per pupil per year. These pupils travel from Armagh, Aughnacloy, Craigavon, Dungannon and Stewartstown.

Gaisce Award

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education how pupils can apply to participate in the Gaisce Award programme; and how many pupils have participated in these awards, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26089/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Young people in the North of Ireland apply to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and do so by registering with their school or youth group. Upon completion of any level of the Award, the Joint Award Initiative agreement enables any young person, in the North of Ireland to choose the certificate they wish to receive; either the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Gaisce- The President's Award, or the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award.

The number of young people who have selected to receive a Gaisce Certificate - in each of the last three years in the North of Ireland are detailed below:-

	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Total
2010	115	15	6	136
2011	162	57	5	224
2012	160	64	25	249

Schools: Homophobic Bullying

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what new measures are being considered to tackle homophobic bullying in schools. (AQW 26101/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Bullying, in whatever form and for whatever reason, has no place in schools. All schools are required by law to have a discipline policy which includes measures to tackle all bullying, including homophobic bullying.

We continue to fund and participate in the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) which arranges awareness raising activities and provides practical support, resources and guidance to schools, parents and pupils.

I have recently asked the Forum to undertake a high-level review of anti-bullying provision here, identifying weaknesses and gaps in our current provision and suggesting those areas in which the Department should initially focus its efforts.

I look forward to hearing the views of the Forum and will give careful consideration to their suggestions.

Teachers: Employment after Redundancy

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how his Department plans to provide employment for redundant teachers. (AQW 26131/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Employing Authorities have a system in place that seeks to redeploy teaching staff facing redundancies through identifying vacancies in other schools. However, it is not possible to guarantee that every teacher in a redundant post will be matched with a teacher who volunteers for redundancy. Therefore, with effect from 1 September 2013 a Reorganisation Agreement has been introduced which will ensure that if a reasonable redeployment opportunity cannot be made, the teacher will be employed as an additional supernumerary teacher for a maximum of two years - with an emphasis on ensuring they fulfil a meaningful role for the duration of their pay protection period.

Every effort continues to be made to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Buddy Bear Trust: ETI Report

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department has taken, following the recommendation by the Education and Training Inspectorate in the Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education Independent School report, to explore the possibility of collaborative working with the Department, Education and Library Boards and schools. (AQW 26135/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have noted the recommendation contained in the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) recent inspection of the Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education Independent School.

In the first instance Departmental officials have been liaising with ETI regarding the inspection report, and in particular the recommendation regarding the possibility of collaborative working. Officials have also engaged with the Education & Library Boards in respect of this recommendation. I understand that a meeting will be convened shortly with ETI to discuss the way forward.

Schools: Inspections

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what arrangements exist between his Department and the Education and Training Inspectorate once a school inspection has been completed. (AQW 26136/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Inspection teams share the key findings with their DE colleagues once the inspection has concluded. Subsequently, they forward the published report. Each school inspected receives a letter from DE congratulating them on the outcome or alternatively outlining what action is required by the Board of Governors in response to the inspection findings.

Teachers: Newly Qualified

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what is he doing to create more opportunities for students to find teaching jobs. (AQW 26159/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I acknowledge that, in the current economic climate, it can be difficult for many Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) to find employment in schools. It remains the case that there is substantial competition for posts and all who apply will not be successful or shortlisted for interview, the same can be said of graduates in a wide range of professions. However, I am

keen to ensure that NQTs are afforded every opportunity not only to gain permanent employment, but also gain valuable experience by providing substitute cover and by filling temporary vacancies.

Over a number of years my Department has taken a number of significant steps to improve the employment prospects of NQTs, including:

- urging employers to give preference to NQTs and experienced non-retired teachers when vacancies arise;
- issue of guidance to all employing authorities and schools informing them that they must use the NI Substitute Teacher Register when booking substitute teachers, thus enabling schools to identify younger, newly qualified teachers;
- challenging schools and employing authorities if prematurely retired teachers are re-employed in preference to NQTs or non-retired teachers;
- making schools liable for the total cost of employing prematurely retired teachers;
- restricting the pay of prematurely retired teachers who have received discretionary compensation ("added years") but who subsequently return to teaching;
- reducing the overall intake numbers to local Initial Teacher Education courses from 880 in 2004/05 to 600 in 2012/13 – a reduction of nearly 32%, which has in part, helped reduce the oversupply of NQTs; and
- most recently, the creation of some 268 additional full-time equivalent teaching posts for graduates qualified in the period from June 2010 to June 2013 through the Delivering Social Change Signature Project on improving literacy and numeracy for children in primary and post primary schools who are currently struggling to achieve even basic educational standards.

Catholic Certificate of Education

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to end the Catholic Certificate of Education for teacher training.

(AQW 26160/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Certificate in Religious Education is a mandatory requirement of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) for all those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position in a Catholic Maintained nursery or primary school and it is therefore important that individuals who wish to teach in those schools have access to appropriate training.

Training is available to student teachers regardless of their religious background either as part of their initial teacher education or through distance learning. However, the onus is on individuals to acquire the Certificate if they wish to do so.

Notwithstanding this, my Department undertook a review of employment opportunities for teaching staff which is available on the Department's website: <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/school-staff/review-of-employment-opportunities-for-teaching-staff.htm>. The purpose of the review was to assess the impact of the requirement for a religious certificate and make recommendations to promote equality of opportunity for all teachers.

Whilst the review did not identify any inequality in employment opportunities arising from the requirement, it highlighted barriers in accessing the Certificate for some students and made recommendations about how those barriers may be overcome. My Department is currently taking forward work on the recommendations.

Schools: Shared Site, Dungannon

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education what measures must be put in place by his Department, the Southern Education and Library Board and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, to progress a shared school site for Moy Regional School, St John's Primary School, Moy and Moy Nursery Playgroup.

(AQW 26165/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the first instance it will be for the SELB and CCMS, as the school managing authorities, to determine and agree the best way forward including any proposals to co-locate schools and share facilities.

My Department is developing a programme aimed at taking forward the delivery of the 10 shared education campuses announced recently by the FM and dFM. When I am in a position to outline how this initiative will be taken forward the schools may wish to examine whether their proposed solution could be achieved through this programme and express an interest accordingly.

GCSEs: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many young people in the North Down constituency (i) achieved; and (ii) did not achieve pass grades in GCSE (a) English; and (b) Maths, in each of the last two years; and how these figures compare to the rest of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 26167/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is contained in the table below.

Number and percentage of school leavers resident in the North Down constituency who (i) achieved and (ii) did not achieve pass grades in GCSE (a) English; and (b) Maths, in each of the last two years

		2010/11		2011/12	
		Number	%	Number	%
(a) GCSE English	(i) Achieved	854 (21078)	97.4 (91.0)	856 (20790)	92.1 (92.1)
	(ii) Not Achieved	23 (2082)	2.6 (9.0)	73 (1778)	7.9 (7.9)
(b) GCSE Maths	(i) Achieved	845 (21389)	96.4 (92.4)	861 (20989)	92.7 (93.0)
	(ii) Not Achieved	32 (1771)	3.6 (7.6)	68 (1579)	7.3 (7.0)

Notes:

Figures in brackets refer to the NI Average

For GCSE, pass grades are grades A*-G

Source: School Leavers Survey

Schools: Pupil Funding

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how funding is determined for students enrolled for years 13 and 14; and whether resources are allocated for a package for students enrolled in year 13 to cover two years or provided for separate enrolments for year 13 and 14.

(AQW 26211/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the funding arrangements for schools are listed in the Common Funding Scheme which is available on the Department's website: www.deni.gov.uk/schools and [infrastructure/schools/finance/common funding scheme](http://infrastructure/schools/finance/common%20funding%20scheme). Details of pupil count and associated funding arrangements are detailed at Annex B of the Scheme.

Schools receive funding on an annual basis. The main element of funding, (on average around 80%) within the formula allocation to schools, is the Age Weighted Pupil Unit funding. Pupils qualify for the higher sixth form weighting only if they are enrolled in Years 13 or 14 and are following a course leading to a qualification at either GCE Advanced Level or AS Level or broadly equivalent to GCE Level 3.

Schools: Pupil Funding

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether schools are entitled to retain funding allocated for students who are enrolling for years 13 and 14, that subsequently leave the school after the AS stage.

(AQW 26216/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the funding arrangements for schools are listed in the Common Funding Scheme which is available on the Department's website: www.deni.gov.uk/schools and [infrastructure/schools/finance/common funding scheme](http://infrastructure/schools/finance/common%20funding%20scheme).

Details of pupil count and associated funding arrangements are detailed at Annex B of the Scheme. Schools receive a delegated budget based on annual enrolment data from the school census return, verified by the appropriate Funding Authority. No funding adjustment is made where a pupil, having previously been regarded as enrolled in a school, leaves at the end of the school year. The pupil will not then be recorded in the next school Census return and will not, therefore, generate funding entitlements for the school in the next financial year.

Schools: Conductive Education

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25576/11-15, why research has not been commissioned into conductive education to assess the viability of this method of teaching.

(AQW 26239/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As stated in my response to AQW 25576/11-15, I have not commissioned research into conductive education as a method of teaching due to the financial constraints under which my department currently operates; priority must be given to the provision of frontline services.

GCSEs: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of people in the North Down constituency that (i) achieved; and (ii) did not achieve five or more GCSE pass grades, in each of the last two years, and to outline how these figures compare with the rest of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 26331/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is contained in the table below.

Number and percentage of school leavers resident in the North Down constituency who (i) achieved and (ii) did not achieve 5 or more GCSE pass grades in the last two years

	2010/11		2011/12	
	Number	%	Number	%
(i) Achieved	837 (21655)	95.4 (93.5)	861 (21363)	92.7 (94.7)
(ii) Not Achieved	40 (1505)	4.6 (6.5)	68 (1205)	7.3 (5.3)

Notes:

Figures in brackets refer to the NI average

For GCSE, pass grades are grades A*-G

Source: School Leavers Survey

Primary Schools: Starting Age

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Education for an update on his recent announcement to review the school starting age.
(AQW 26351/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to AQW 25720/11-15 published on 27 September 2013, tabled by Peter Weir.

Department for Employment and Learning**South West College: Special Needs**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to the remarks published in the Tyrone Courier on 11 Sept 2013 by the current Director of South West College, to detail; (i) his assessment of the comments; (ii) whether there is provision of these courses in the Dungannon campus; (iii) which campus the director of South West College is predominately based; and (iv) all the direct engagement South West College held with Sperrinview Special School and parents, carers and people with learning disabilities in the Dungannon area over the last two years.
(AQW 25873/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

- (i) Further education colleges are responsible for determining their own curriculum provision - therefore, it is the responsibility of each college to assess the need for specific courses, taking into consideration all relevant factors, including potential demand, transport infrastructure and financial viability.

I am content that the South West College endeavours to offer a wide range of provision across their catchment areas, through main campuses and community outreach centres, seeking to meet the learning needs of all students in local communities, subject to demand, locally.
- (ii) I am aware that the 'On Board PLP' (Personal Learning Programme), is currently running, on a part-time basis, at the Dungannon campus, and has 9 enrolments. This course is also available in the Cookstown campus on a part-time and full-time basis.
- (iii) The Director is mainly based in the Omagh campus, however he covers all campuses. Deputy Directors are based in each of SWC's main campuses.
- (iv) SWC has advised that they have close links with Day Opportunity Workers and Transitions Officers. Over the past five years, the college has used these links, along with meetings with school principals, open days and celebration of achievement events, to raise awareness of opportunities with students, parents and school managers.

Employment: Renewable Energies

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the opportunities that currently exist for people receiving Job Seekers Allowance to start a career in renewable energies.
(AQW 25992/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department offers a wide range of support to clients, including those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, to gain employment. My staff within the Employment Service are actively engaging with employers across all industry sectors within Northern Ireland, including those in the renewable energy sector to:

- promote the Department's programmes and services such as the Youth Employment Scheme, Steps to Work and Apprenticeships;
- supply employers with clients who match their recruitment criteria; and
- deliver a customised recruitment service to meet employers' business needs.

My Department's Careers Service also provides professional and impartial all age careers information advice and guidance relating to a range of education and training programmes and employment opportunities. My careers advisers would be able

to advise any client on skills and entry requirements, as well as current and future job opportunities, within the renewable energy sector.

ApprenticeshipsNI is my Department's flagship programme in Northern Ireland. It enables learners, who have attained the minimum school leaving age and are in paid employment, to gain an industry recognised apprenticeship qualification. Apprentices follow a national training framework at Level 2 or 3, which lead to attainment of Essential Skills, a competence based qualifications and if applicable, a knowledge based qualification. My Department would be keen to support apprentices into the renewable energy sector.

My Department's further education curriculum policy has been developed to ensure that colleges have a strong focus on provision that supports the economy, strengthens workforce development and advances an individual's skills and learning. Clients can avail of the following courses which are related to renewable energy sector:

- Solar Photovoltaic Installer;
- Solar Thermal Installer;
- Micro Hydro Installer;
- HETAS Biomass (HETAS is the official body recognized by Government to approve biomass heating appliances).

Colleges also offer a Level 3 course in Sustainable Construction (which has renewable energy content).

These are provided by Further Education colleges. They are the main providers of professional and technical education and training in Northern Ireland, and in particular the North West Regional College offers a number of opportunities for JSA participants wishing to start a career in renewable energies.

Apprenticeships: Electrical Training Trust

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline why applicants on Job Seekers Allowance, who are over the age of twenty four, have to self-finance an apprenticeship with the Electrical Training Trust.
(AQW 25993/11-15)

Dr Farry: ApprenticeshipsNI aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship where the apprentice works towards achieving qualifications as set out in an industry-approved Apprenticeship Framework.

For participants aged from 16 to 24 years of age, in permanent remunerative employment, working a minimum of 21 contracted hours per week, my Department funds the 'off-the-job' training element of an apprenticeship.

From 27 August 2012, funding for adult apprentices (age 25 and over) is available only in the priority economic sectors needed to rebalance the economy. These are: business services (specifically ICT); financial services; food and drink manufacturing; advanced manufacturing; advanced engineering; and the emerging sectors of life and health sciences and the creative industries.

This policy was introduced to ensure support is targeted at meeting the skills needs of high value/high paid jobs in sectors with the potential to expand, to innovate and to export.

Employment Service Advisers, working in the Department's network of Jobs and Benefits Offices, are available to discuss a range of training and employment options.

Finally, as the member will be aware, back in February, I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned and I will be reporting its findings in autumn.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following the success of the pilot English for Speakers of Other Languages programme, which provided free access to English lessons for the refugee and asylum seekers community, whether his Department has any plans to roll the programme out to other ethnic minorities.
(AQW 26041/11-15)

Dr Farry: In August 2012 my Department introduced free English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses for asylum seekers only. This particular group do not have access to the UK benefits system and the opportunity to learn English is a critical element in assisting them to settle and integrate into Northern Ireland society. Asylum seekers who commence an ESOL class and then attain refugee status part way through are able to complete that course free of charge. The policy was introduced on a one year pilot basis and remains in place whilst it is being evaluated. There are currently no plans to roll this approach out to other minority groups.

ESOL provision is widely available across Northern Ireland through the further education college network and is given the highest weighting within the funding formula in recognition of its importance to the economy and the promotion of social cohesion. Colleges make a small charge for provision with concession fees available to those on means tested benefits. In the most recent academic year for which full information is available, 2011/2012, there were 4,110 enrolments in ESOL courses.

WorldHost Programme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the World Host Programme; and for how long his Department plans to continue subsidising the Programme.

(AQW 26045/11-15)

Dr Farry: The WorldHost programme has played an important part in boosting customer service skills during an exciting and challenging period for tourism in Northern Ireland. Nearly 7000 employees have achieved this Level 2 Customer Service qualification with funding assistance delivered through my Department's Skills Solutions Service. Feedback from participants and employers has been very positive indeed indicating improved customer service for the businesses and enhanced skills for individuals leading to increasing satisfaction for visitors.

The programme will continue to be funded until the end of March 2014. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and People 1st have an evaluation process in place which will guide my Department's future funding decisions on this and associated World Host programmes .

St Eugene's Secondary, Castlederg : Adult Education and Training

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his proposals for Adult Education and Training provision in the former St Eugene's Secondary School, Castlederg

(AQW 26153/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are no proposals for Adult Education and Training provision in the former Saint Eugene's Secondary School, Castlederg.

Technical Skills: Training

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline how craft training courses are being promoted to enhance the technical skills training for engineering fabrication and other technical skilled workers.

(AQW 26158/11-15)

Dr Farry: I recognise the importance of the engineering sector to the Northern Ireland economy and as a result, in 2012, I established the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Services Working Group of which I am Chair.

The group is a partnership between Government, business and the education and training sectors and is actively working to identify and overcome the current and future skill needs of the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector.

SEMTA, the Sector Skills Council for engineering, is represented on the group. Its remit is to bring together employers and education to focus action on skills and they are primarily responsible for the promotion of training courses. Training providers and colleges also have a key role to play in promoting course provision through their own employer engagement teams.

My Departments' Skills Solutions team also works with individual businesses with regard to helping employers understand and access the Department's training provision. This is a proactive service to local industry and enables companies to up-skill and re-skill their employees.

DEL: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 26222/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since 2007 there have been one hundred and forty six North South Ministerial Council meetings, including twelve in Plenary and seven in Institutional format, which have been attended by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

There have been twenty eight meetings under the aegis of the British Irish Council attended by Ministers, including twelve at Summit level.

We do not collate information on other bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC involving individual Ministers or officials.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourism: Film

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what research her Department has carried out into the future of film tourism.

(AQW 25701/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): According to an independent research report from Olsberg/SPI Ltd "Building sustainable film businesses: the challenges for industry and government", film has a significant positive effect on tourism, as shown by many studies in a variety of countries around the world. Based on research such as this my Department and its agencies are keen to exploit the potential of film tourism.

Northern Ireland has emerged as a destination for local and international productions with several high profile film and TV productions shot here in recent years including Oscar-winning *The Shore*, *Blandings*, *Nick Nickleby*, *Your Highness*, *Good Vibrations*, *City of Ember* and the award-winning HBO's *Game of Thrones*. As well as the economic impact and job creation that these productions bring, the media interest generated can deliver exciting tourism opportunities.

Tourist visit decisions are based on several factors but experiencing a destination through a shared, film entertainment experience can be a major element.

With this fact in mind, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Tourism Ireland continue to explore tourism opportunities arising from this emerging market and I am aware of several TV and film productions, shot on location in Northern Ireland, which are scheduled for release in 2014. NITB and Tourism Ireland will seek to maximise the opportunities that such releases present for the Northern Ireland tourism industry moving forward.

Tourism: EU Visitors

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the number of visitors from the European Union compared against the target set, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 25732/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The figures for European Visitors, excluding Great Britain and Republic of Ireland visitors, to Northern Ireland for the last 3 years are as follows:

	2010	2011	2012
**European Visitors	219,003	253,310	252,962

No targets were set in the Programme for Government specifically relating to European visitors. However there has been a 15% increase in all European visitors, excluding Great Britain and Republic of Ireland visitors, visiting Northern Ireland since 2010.

The survey data does not differentiate between EU and non-EU European visitors.

** **Source:** Northern Ireland Passenger Survey, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Survey of Overseas Travellers, Fáilte Ireland

County Tyrone: Engineering Companies

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the contribution to the local economy made by engineering companies based in Co. Tyrone, including Tyrex Finlay; and to detail how her Department, working in partnership with other Departments, can help local engineering companies to develop further their business.
(AQW 25805/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and in particular Invest NI is very much aware of the positive contribution that engineering companies in County Tyrone make to the Northern Ireland economy. In particular, Terex GB Ltd, which is owned by the US Terex Corporation, is a major manufacturer of mobile materials handling equipment which is exported worldwide from its facilities in Omagh and Dungannon.

A number of Tyrone engineering companies contribute to the supply chain into Terex GB and other large companies while others are manufacturers and exporters in their own right.

Invest NI's Materials Handling sector team is very active with engineering companies in Tyrone and work on a one to one basis to encourage them to grow.

The full range of Invest NI support is available to these companies. In particular, Selective Financial Assistance (SFA) including the Jobs Fund is available to help companies expand and create jobs, Research and Development support is available and widely used by Tyrone engineering companies to design and develop new internationally competitive products, support to train the management team and workforce compliments the training support available from DEL, and support with market development expenditure is available under the Growth Accelerator Programme (GAP) alongside a range of other advisory and financial support to provide tailored solutions to each company.

Tyrone companies are active participants on Invest NI trade missions and International sector specific exhibitions such as Bauma (Africa), Bauma (Germany), Intermat (France), Hillhead (GB), and Conexpo (USA), where companies are part of an Invest NI organised stand and attend business meetings arranged in advance.

Invest NI in market support now covers the important markets of Asia Pacific, India, Russia, Latin America and other countries, as well as Europe.

Invest NI: Local Product Manufacture

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies or individuals, who were assisted with product development by Invest NI, were able to secure local product manufacture and/or assembly.
(AQW 25826/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between April 2011 and August 2013 Invest NI has assisted in the region of 1,200 product development projects. Products developed range in complexity from large machines to single components.

Invest NI can assist companies with the development of new products and can advise of the range of manufacturing options in Northern Ireland but ultimately companies will take a commercial decision on the best manufacturing model for the product.

Companies have three main options when determining the best model for product manufacture:

- Manufacture in house
- Sub contract manufacture locally
- Sub contract manufacture offshore

Cost is normally the primary driver for this decision however there are a number of other factors companies will consider when making their decision, these include lead time, quality, security of IP, time to implement design changes and better local partnerships.

To stay competitive in global markets Northern Ireland companies need to continually review manufacturing options for their new and existing products. It is therefore difficult to calculate a breakdown of the three main manufacturing options however based on Invest NI's engagement the indicative level of products manufactured completely outside of Northern Ireland would be estimated at no more than 20%.

Invest NI's Technical Advisory Unit (TAU) offer advice to companies who have developed products and want to source manufacturing or assembly options in Northern Ireland. Companies can avail of one to one advice with TAU staff with expertise in specific manufacturing technologies and a comprehensive knowledge of facilities in Northern Ireland. This service allows companies to make an informed decision on retaining manufacture in Northern Ireland.

There are a wide range of Northern Ireland companies who successfully compete in local and global markets for sub-contract manufacture, examples are:

- Metal fabrication – McAuley Engineering Ballymoney, Hutchinson Eng Kilrea
- Injection moulding – Crossen Eng Moneyreagh, IPC Carrickfergus
- Precision Engineering – Moyola Precision Castledawson, J W Kane Precision Craigavon
- 3D printing - Whale Bangor, Laser Prototypes Belfast
- Composites – Creative Composites Lisburn, Wright Composites Ballymena
- Electronics – Elite Electronics Enniskillen, Nitronica Ballynahinch

In the last number of years an increasing number of Northern Ireland companies have taken the decision to source their manufacture and assembly locally. Reasons cited for more favourable local sourcing are:

- Gap between offshore costs and Northern Ireland costs narrowing
- Less labour cost as a % of manufacture reducing as production systems become more sophisticated
- More control over quality, delivery times, batch sizes etc
- Rising fuel costs for transportation from off-shore regions
- Easier to make design changes/amendments at short notice
- Security of Intellectual Property
- Better partnership approach with local suppliers

Invest NI: Employment

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of how Invest NI facilitates employment growth.
(AQW 25827/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is responsible for the delivery of the Programme for Government's key priority of promoting 25,000 new jobs by 31 March 2015. In seeking to achieve this goal, the majority of Invest NI's activity is focused on supporting growth projects which will lead to higher added-value jobs by attracting inward investment, and by helping our indigenous businesses to grow and develop, supporting them to invest in R&D and innovation and assisting them to expand into overseas markets.

Invest NI also helps facilitate employment growth by encouraging new business start-ups across Northern Ireland and, in direct response to the economic downturn, introduced the Jobs Fund which has a clear priority to create jobs quickly to help address local unemployment.

Despite the economic uncertainty of the last few years Invest NI is on track to deliver against its overall Programme for Government objective, with almost 14,000 jobs promoted by 31 March 2013 and the organisation remains focused on doing

all it can to continue to win new high quality inward investments and ensure that our local businesses are fully equipped with everything they need to help them grow and develop further, creating new employment opportunities as they do so.

Exports

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the contribution that exports make to the local economy.

(AQW 25956/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Exports of goods and a small group of internationally-tradable services in Northern Ireland were valued at £6.5 billion in 2011, which represented 22% of gross value added (GVA). This is an increase from 20% in 2010.

Export comparisons with other UK regions are only available for the manufacturing sector. Northern Ireland exports of goods were valued at £6.0 billion in 2011, equivalent to 20% of GVA in 2011. This placed Northern Ireland eighth of the 12 UK regions and below the UK average of 22%.

International comparisons are not available on a like-for-like basis as national economies have data on a wider range of sectors than are available for Northern Ireland. However, small open economies such as Finland (40% of GDP), Switzerland (51%), Sweden (49%), Austria (57%) and Netherlands (87%) clearly demonstrate a high contribution from exports.

It is well established that economies benefit from external trading. At the firm level there are a number of studies which highlight that exporting companies are larger, more productive, pay higher wages and are more capital intensive than those which focus mainly on domestic markets. Evidence also suggests that there are benefits not just from entering export markets, but also from increasing export intensity.

It is for this reason that the Executive's Economic Strategy focuses on export led economic growth, in order to achieve its overarching goal of improving the economic competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy.

Mobile Infrastructure Project: Arqiva

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) level; (ii) dates; and (iii) content of the communication and engagements that have taken place between her officials and Arqiva with regard to the roll out of the Mobile Infrastructure Project.

(AQW 25983/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Mobile Infrastructure Project is administered and resourced directly by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in London and thus DCMS has the contractual relationship with Arqiva as the project supplier.

DETI officials, at management level, have engaged with DCMS on the project since it was first announced and have met with Arqiva on two occasions since contract award. The first occasion was on 5 June 2013 when officials participated in a stakeholder workshop in London at which Arqiva set out details of the implementation process. On 19 July DETI officials hosted a meeting in Belfast in order that DCMS, Arqiva and representatives from their sub-contractor Harlequin could discuss the project with DOE Planning Service officials.

Since that meeting, DETI officials have, through DCMS, provided Arqiva/Harlequin with contact details for other interested parties including Northern Ireland Water and Land & Property Services over access to land and rent and rates issues.

DETI officials are maintaining contact with DCMS and are continuing to assist at a local level where appropriate.

SMEs: Energy Efficiency

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the work her Department is undertaking to encourage SMEs to improve the energy efficiency of their equipment.

(AQW 26046/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides a range of support for businesses to encourage improvements in energy efficiency and to assist with the management of energy costs. This support includes technical advice, free energy efficiency audits, action plans and project management support to help businesses to implement the most effective cost saving opportunities.

Invest NI Technical Advisors visit businesses and support companies to undertake energy and resource audits as well as offering technical consultancy on energy efficiency and renewable technology projects.

Invest NI also provides full funding for the Energy Efficiency Loan Fund in Northern Ireland which is managed and delivered by Carbon Trust. The Loan Fund offers interest-free loans from £3,000 - £400,000 to Northern Ireland businesses to help them install more energy efficient equipment.

Invest NI and Manufacturing NI have recently launched a guide to encourage companies to improve energy efficiency and consider adopting renewable energy technologies. 'Energy Independence' has been developed by Manufacturing NI and Carbon Trust with funding from Invest NI to provide advice and information on reducing the cost of energy consumption through on-site generation of electricity or heat from renewable sources.

Invest NI will consider providing Selective Financial Assistance to Large Energy Users that bring forward proposals for capital expenditure on equipment that will make a significant impact on energy efficiency.

Invest NI also funds council initiatives to assist small businesses, with a resource spend of less than £30,000 per year, to undertake a variety of energy efficient projects through the LED (Local Enterprise Development) measures. The Cookstown Resource Efficiency Programme and the BITES programme are examples of these initiatives.

Invest NI: Sustainable Development Programmes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses have signed up to Invest NI's Sustainable Development Programmes.

(AQW 26047/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Invest NI Sustainable Productivity Programme (SPP) provides a range of support for Northern Ireland businesses with a total annual resource spend of more than £30,000 on energy, water, waste and raw materials. This support is aimed at improving the competitiveness, productivity and sustainability of businesses through the identification and achievement of cost savings in the consumption of energy, water and raw materials.

The three year programme commenced on 1st April 2012 and aims to provide around £12million of resource efficiency support to Northern Ireland businesses over the period April 2012 to March 2015.

The range of support includes:

- Company visits from Invest NI Technical Advisors
- Resource Efficiency Capital grant
- The Energy Efficiency Loan Fund
- Resource Efficiency Audits
- Technical Consultancy
- Industrial Symbiosis support.

For the period from 1st April 2012 to 31st August 2013 over 1,300 businesses have received support under the Sustainable Productivity Programme.

Invest NI: Resource Efficiency Capital Grant

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses have availed of the Resource Efficiency Capital Grant since its inception.

(AQW 26048/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides financial support for resource efficiency projects through the Resource Efficiency Capital Grant as part of the Invest NI Sustainable Productivity Programme. £1.65million of funding is available for the period from April 2012 to March 2015. The aim of this funding is to encourage Invest NI supported businesses to install equipment that will result in water or material efficiencies beyond regulatory requirements through provision of a capital grant of up to £40,000.

Two calls for applications have been completed since the launch of the Resource Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme in September 2012. During this time 70 applications were received resulting in 52 Grant Offers being made to 40 companies to help them achieve combined water and materials savings of £1.7million. A further call for projects closes on 30th September 2013.

Examples of projects that have been funded include equipment to recover value from waste and effluent streams, equipment to recover materials that would otherwise be vented to the atmosphere or discharged to land or waterways, equipment that improves the efficiency of raw material consumption through improved processing or equipment that enables re-use of waste materials in-house and equipment that makes use of sustainable resources such as rainwater, groundwater or borehole water.

Carbon Trust: Energy Efficiency Loans

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is encouraging SMEs to avail of the Carbon Trust's interest free energy efficiency loans.

(AQW 26049/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI fully funds the highly successful Energy Efficiency Interest Free Loan Fund managed by the Carbon Trust in Northern Ireland. This fund currently sits at £12million and is fully recycled. It is a heavily subscribed and competitive fund with projects delivering energy savings of approximately £1.8million per year.

The Energy Efficiency Loan Fund is promoted at a range of events organised throughout Northern Ireland and through the 1:1 engagements between Invest NI technical advisors and individual companies.

Invest NI also promotes the Loan Fund through nibusinessinfo.co.uk, Invest NI's social media channels and through internal presentations to all Invest NI client facing teams.

Broadband: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to improve broadband services in South Antrim.

(AQW 26114/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has initiated the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project which aims to provide a 2Mbps broadband service to virtually all premises in Northern Ireland and 24Mbps superfast broadband to 90% of premises by 2015.

A consultation exercise, to identify areas where intervention may be required was undertaken in September 2012 and the outcome published on 5 July 2013, coupled with a refined intervention area.

The process is subject to continuous refinement and a second consultation exercise was recently carried out and completed on 16 August 2013. The results are currently being analysed to ensure that any intervention complies with strict State Aid rules.

It is intended that this project will move to the procurement stage shortly, with a contract expected to be signed by the end of the year and implementation completed by the end of 2015. This project will benefit a number of areas, including rural South Antrim.

Economic Conference: Benefit to Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what specific measures her Department has taken to ensure that Co. Fermanagh benefits from the economic conference planned for November 2013.

(AQW 26213/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Investment Conference planned for October is a direct result of the hosting of this year's G8 Summit in Fermanagh under the presidency of the UK and will promote Northern Ireland's ambition for economic prosperity and capitalise on the long term economic potential of a G8 legacy.

It will showcase the substantial benefits that investors have already experienced and will highlight the value proposition on offer to prospective new investors and will allow delegates to experience first-hand the significant assets and capabilities which Northern Ireland has to offer across a range of sectors.

As part of the conference, Invest NI sought material from all 26 Councils for inclusion in a Northern Ireland showcase and I am delighted that Fermanagh District Council responded positively and that appropriate imagery will be incorporated.

In addition, the quality of our food produce from throughout Northern Ireland, including Fermanagh, will be incorporated in to menus which the attendees will sample during the conference.

For any delegates wishing to extend their stay and see more of Northern Ireland, Invest NI has worked with NITB to develop suitable itineraries.

Invest NI is also in the early stages of planning to enable its overseas team to spend two days in Fermanagh next year as part of their annual sales conference to engage with local businesses and stakeholders and enhance their knowledge of the regions proposition.

Green Investment Bank: North Antrim

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what funding opportunities, provided through the Green Investment Bank, can be progressed to the benefit of companies in North Antrim.

(AQW 26257/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Green Investment Bank (GIB) has been proactive in Northern Ireland since it was set up in promoting its remit and investment products. Invest NI has actively supported this through a series of 'Funding for Renewables' events across Northern Ireland at which contact details for GIB were provided.

GIB is mandated to deploy at least 80% of its £3bn capital to three priority sectors: Offshore wind; Waste recycling and energy from waste; and Energy efficiency. It has a range of financial products and up to 20% of its capital can be allocated in other sectors, with emerging technologies such as Biofuels for transport; Carbon capture and storage; and Marine energy.

All Northern Ireland companies, including those in north Antrim, that have potential investment projects which meet the criteria of the bank and in particular the sectors in which it operates should consider GIB as a potential investment partner and I would encourage them to contact GIB and discuss their projects. Invest NI includes GIB as a potential funding source as part of its wider funding in renewables initiative and is well positioned to advise any companies developing renewable projects.

GIB has already approved its first funding project in Northern Ireland, a £20 million investment with Evermore Energy on a project in Londonderry and I understand it is in discussions with other organisations here.

Department of the Environment

Compliance Improvement and Review Team

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 20928/11-15, when the ongoing audit of minerals files by the Compliance Improvement and Review Team is scheduled to be completed; and whether the audit results will be published or made available to the public on request.

(AQW 22040/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): In a response to AQW 20928/11-15 my predecessor (Minister Alex Attwood) indicated that there was an ongoing audit of minerals planning application files which had not yet been completed. The report relating to this audit is currently at draft stage and will be finalised within the next month following consideration by management.

Audit reports are internal and are not published as it is considered that the publication or release of these internal reports could undermine the value of work undertaken by the Compliance, Improvement & Review Team and could potentially prejudice the outcome of any future audit work.

Local Government: Review of Public Administration

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether any of his Department's local government staff have been given salary increases or promotions to deal with the increased workload caused by RPA; and whether any such awards will be permanent.

(AQW 25195/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There has been no salary increases given to Local Government staff to deal with the increased workload in advance of Local Government Reform. There has however, been one temporary promotion to a new Grade 5 (SCS) post for a period of 18-24 months. The post vacated by the officer on temporary promotion will remain vacant for the duration of the arrangement.

Dereliction Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what assistance his Department will give local councils that are awarded funding under the dereliction scheme and that may face challenges in spending the funding by April 2014.

(AQW 25254/11-15)

Mr Durkan: One of the conditions which councils must meet when applying for Dereliction Intervention Funding is that their projects have to be completed by the end of the current financial year. This is because the existing public financial process does not permit flexibility, either to the Department or to councils, in relation to this date.

There is, therefore, no assistance that the Department can offer, should councils find that they cannot complete the works by that date.

Planning: Activity Centre, Kilkeel

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment why the planning application for an activity centre on Fair Road, Greencastle, Kilkeel, Co. Down was approved by Newry and Mourne Council on 6 September 2012, given that a green form has not yet been issued.

(AQW 25370/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The planning application for an activity centre on Fair Road, Greencastle, Kilkeel was presented to Newry and Mourne Council on 6 September 2012 with an opinion to approve. The Council raised no objection to the proposal.

In view of the level of local objection, the Minister at the time requested that no decision issue until he had heard representations from the Member of Parliament and local objectors. A meeting took place in October 2012.

Thereafter, further information was requested from, and provided by, the applicant. Following a review of this information, my predecessor had intended to have further discussions with officials and to visit the site.

I had the opportunity to visit the site with the planning official recently. I am still considering the application.

Gasification Plant in Derry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment his Department has made of Brickkiln as an appropriate company to operate the proposed gasification plant in Derry.

(AQW 25465/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The assessment of bidder proposals is a matter for the procuring councils under whose authority and on whose behalf the North West Region Waste Management Group (NWRWMG) has conducted its procurement in accordance with all the requisite legislative guidance. The Preferred Bidder chosen by the councils of the NWRWMG to deliver the new waste infrastructure is a consortium, the SBS Partnership, comprising Sisk, an Irish based international construction firm, Shanks

Group PLC, a UK-based international waste management firm with operations in Northern Europe and Canada, and Brickkiln, a Derry-based firm engaged in Waste Management and Civil Engineering.

The record and history of individual members of the preferred bidder consortium in relation to other planning sites was not considered a material planning matter in the determination of the planning application for the proposed gasification plant in Maydown. Each planning application is assessed on its own merits in accordance with the relevant planning policy, guidance and advice.

The consortium's proposed facility will require a permit under the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2012 issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). No permit application for the proposal has as yet been received by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. If and when an application is received, it will have to demonstrate that the installation will be designed, constructed and operated in accordance with Best Available Techniques (BAT) – in particular in line with the requirements of Chapter IV and Annex VI of the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED). This will include provision of detailed information on the proposed process and technologies.

The permit application would be subject to consultation. It would also be advertised and made available for the general public to examine at public registers at Derry City Council and the NIEA offices in Belfast. Anyone may make written representations to NIEA in respect of the application, within 42 days of the advertisement.

Staff: Disciplinary Issues

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost in legal fees to each council of staff disciplinary issues, in each year since 2008.

(AQW 25730/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As this information is not held by the Department, it has been obtained from each of the councils. Their responses are recorded in the tables below.

Council	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Antrim	Nil	Nil	Nil
Ards	No Records	No Records	No Records
Armagh	5214.50	10172.00	2965.00
Ballymena	Nil	Nil	Nil
Ballymoney	Nil	Nil	Nil
Banbridge	326.06	Nil	3009.42
Belfast	Nil	2070.00	Nil
Carrickfergus	Nil	Nil	Nil
Castlereagh	15695.75	14182.44	4118.37
Coleraine	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cookstown	Nil	Nil	Nil
Craigavon	Nil	Nil	Nil
Derry	Nil	Nil	Nil
Down	Nil	Nil	Nil
Dungannon and South Tyrone	1446.00	400.00	1215.00
Fermanagh	Nil	Nil	Nil
Larne	543.09	Nil	Nil
Limavady	1369.50	2475.00	2095.67
Lisburn	3154.24	960.97	21768.43
Magherafelt	Nil	Nil	25761.50
Moyle	Nil	Nil	Nil
Newry & Mourne	98.70	174.60	10772.50
Newtownabbey	Nil	Nil	326.00
North Down	5090.00	2629.00	11133.00
Omagh	532.00	806.00	719.00
Strabane	Nil	Nil	Nil

Council	2011/2012	2012/2013
Antrim	Nil	Nil
Ards	Nil	Nil
Armagh	758.00	Nil
Ballymena	Nil	Nil
Ballymoney	Nil	Nil
Banbridge	105.00	Nil
Belfast	Nil	4400.00
Carrickfergus	Nil	2545.00
Castlereagh	19147.70	Nil
Coleraine	1022.00	Nil
Cookstown	Nil	Nil
Craigavon	2275.00	4216.00
Derry	Nil	Nil
Down	Nil	Nil
Dungannon and South Tyrone	Nil	1287.24
Fermanagh	Nil	Nil
Larne	341.70	Nil
Limavady	1053.36	1811.87
Lisburn	4048.46	648.16
Magherafelt	13120.00	Nil
Moyle	Nil	Nil
Newry & Mourne	5820.00	300.00
Newtownabbey	1083.50	1641.00
North Down	8204.00	15619.00
Omagh	463.00	Nil
Strabane	Nil	Nil

Planning Applications: Open File Policy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 22037/11-15, how his response is in line with his Department's claim to operate an open file policy in regard to planning applications.
(AQW 25740/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has operated an 'Open File System' since 19 November 2001 to enhance the openness of planning processes by making planning application files available for viewing by the public. Planning applications are also available to view online on the NI Planning Portal.

My predecessor (Minister Attwood's) response to AQW 22037/11-15 advises that the information requested is associated with an ongoing audit of minerals planning application files, which is currently at draft report stage for management comment. I would refer the member to my response to AQW 25615/11-15 in this instance.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Ministerial Visit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what method of notification was used to ensure that local MLAs and the MP for the constituency were informed of his visit to County Hall, Coleraine on 11 September 2013, to meet staff of the Driver and Vehicle Agency.
(AQW 25751/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Local MLAs and the MP were informed of my visit to the East Londonderry constituency by email to the relevant party office on the evening of Thursday 10 September 2013. Regrettably the reason, location and timing of the visit were

omitted from the email sent by my private office. I have asked my private office to ensure that in future, adequate notice and as much information as possible is included in all constituency visit notifications.

Cycling: By-laws in North Down

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his Department's approval of the proposed No Cycling By-Laws for North Down Borough.

(AQW 25785/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Departmental officials have been working with North Down Borough Council (the Council), the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and Departmental Solicitor's Office to ensure that the Council's proposed bye-laws to regulate cycling and other matters are valid and agreeable to all parties.

The Department received a version of the proposed bye-laws from the Council on 30 July 2013 and officials have advised the Council that, subject to a number of amendments being made, the bye-laws are suitable for confirmation.

The Council has been asked to provide the Department with a revised version of the bye-law before it is confirmed by both the Department and DCAL.

Marine Life Rescue Service

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment, given the recent beaching of a Sei whale on a County Antrim beach, whether he has given any consideration to a Marine Life Rescue Service or coordination of volunteers similar to the British Divers Marine Life Rescue.

(AQW 25790/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has competently performed a Marine Life Rescue Role for many years and indeed played the pivotal role in the co-ordination of the Sei Whale stranding response. A member of DOE Marine Division staff arrived on scene and assumed the role of Beach master co-ordinating with other agencies and the general public. An off duty member of NIEA staff who is also a member of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group performed a vital role in keeping the general public and press up-dated with facts and figures as well as explaining the circumstances in which a whale would be euthanized.

DOE Marine Division instructed the local coastguard to provide beach security to protect the animal from further distress and also called on the services of a vet with experience in the assessment and euthanasia of stranded cetaceans. Following the death of the whale, DOE arranged for Moyle Council to secure the site over the weekend and the removal of remains to a landfill site. DOE commissioned at short notice an autopsy, performed by AFB, assisted by DOE in order to gather more science as to why these creatures strand at the landfill site. These results are forwarded to the UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme. During the autopsy DOE recovered material from the carcass which will be used for public education and future awareness raising such as explaining our policies on when to rescue or euthanize.

In 2008 DOE organised an inter agency Marine Life Stranding training course, attended by DOE, the Coastguard, Local Coastal Authorities, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, The National Trust and Vets with an expertise in marine mammals. This resulted in an agreed Call Out Protocol, the procurement of life saving equipment and a better understanding of the conditions in which a rescue or humane destruction should be considered.

The protocol was applied in both the Sei whale stranding and more recently in the case of a low profile stranding of a very young pilot whale calf. The agencies involved in these two recent cases included DOE, the Coastguard, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Moyle and Coleraine Councils and the PSNI.

My Department intends to run a further inter agency training course early in 2014 when the existing protocol will be reviewed and updated.

On the question of whether either of the recent whales could be saved, the simple answer is no. In both cases the veterinary advice based on extensive scientific evidence and the medical condition of both whales was to put them down humanely by lethal injection. The Sei Whale died 30 minutes before the vet arrived.

Any attempt to save either of these two animals would have caused undue suffering, needlessly prolonging the animals' distress.

In the past, smaller animals such as dolphins and porpoises have been saved in similar stranding circumstances when they did not have underlying health problems and were not maternally dependant.

I am content that my Department provides a professional marine life rescue service, as demonstrated in the recent stranding events and therefore there is no need to establish a voluntary service similar to that of British Diver Marine Life Rescue.

Dereliction Fund

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the most recent round of the Dereliction Fund.

(AQW 25800/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Dereliction Intervention Scheme has been very successful and will be a rolling programme which my department will be bidding to maintain.

Over a 3 year period £3.7m has been allocated to councils to tackle the detrimental impact on amenity caused by derelict or dilapidated buildings and gap sites, particularly on the built environment.

As part of the June monitoring round we received funding of £1.5 million. This has been allocated to 15 councils to be spent this financial year.

On 23 August 2013, we received further bids for funding from 16 councils and as a result as part of the October monitoring round we have asked for £2 million. We are currently waiting on a decision as to whether this funding will be made available.

Waste Disposal: Licences to Bale Tyres

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many licences to bale tyres have been granted to waste disposal firms in each of the last three years.

(AQW 25813/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Two licences which permitted the baling of waste tyres were granted in 2010. No licences were granted in 2011. Two licences were granted in 2012. There have been no applications in 2013.

Recycling: Waste Rubber

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment why Publicly Available Specification 107 and 108 on the recycling of waste rubber have not been endorsed locally.

(AQW 25814/11-15)

Mr Durkan: These business standards for crumbed tyres (PAS107) and baled tyres (PAS 108) are used to develop Waste Quality Protocols which meet the terms of the European Waste Framework Directive. Only one of these standards (PAS107) has been used to develop a protocol in England. They are not used in Scotland and not endorsed in Northern Ireland because of outstanding concerns about chemical leaching.

However, NIEA is working closely with the Environment Agency to update the tyre crumb Quality Protocol with a view to its adoption, and is considering a Regulatory Position Statement to enable local use of baled tyres for construction.

Tyres: Disposal

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the current methods used for the disposal of waste tyres.

(AQW 25815/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The All Island Used Tyre Survey that was published in January 2013 made an assessment of how the used tyres generated in the island of Ireland were managed during 2010/11. The following table shows the Northern Ireland tonnages for each management option. Figures for other years are not available.

Management Option	Tonnage
Recycling and Reprocessing	13,370
Reuse/Retread	41
Landfill/Engineering	1,116
Agricultural and other Temporary Uses	942
Part Worns	1,365
Unknown	1,763

The published survey and is available on the DOE website at www.doeni.gov.uk/all_island_used_tyre_survey_report.pdf

Tyres: Disposal

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many waste tyres have been disposed of in each of the last four years.

(AQW 25817/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The All Island Used Tyre Survey that was published in January 2013 estimated that in Northern Ireland there was a total of 18,597 tonnes of used tyre arisings in 2010/11, which equates to approximately 1.8 million tyres. Figures for other years are not available.

The published survey is available on the DOE website at www.doeni.gov.uk/all_island_used_tyre_survey_report.pdf

Tyres: Disposal

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many firms have applied for a licence to dispose of waste tyres, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 25819/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Disposal of waste tyres is banned by the Landfill Directive so all tyres must be recovered. This question has been interpreted as licence applications for facilities to manage, treat or store waste tyres which are subsequently sent for reuse or recovery.

There were four applications for licences for waste facilities which included the management of waste tyres in 2010. There were five applications in 2011. There were four applications in 2012. There have been no applications in 2013.

Local Government: Allotment Provision

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives to encourage local councils to improve allotment provision. (AQW 25821/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Neither I, nor my predecessor, have had any discussions with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association or the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives on allotment provision.

My Department does not provide funding for the provision of allotments however the Northern Ireland Environment Agency through the Challenge Fund, which is administered by the Northern Ireland Environment Link, last year provided support for two allotment projects.

Councils already have powers to provide allotments and many do, and so my Department has not considered imposing a Statutory Obligation on Councils to provide them.

Local Government: Allotment Provision

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to imposing a statutory obligation on councils to provide allotments. (AQW 25822/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Neither I, nor my predecessor, have had any discussions with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association or the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives on allotment provision.

My Department does not provide funding for the provision of allotments however the Northern Ireland Environment Agency through the Challenge Fund, which is administered by the Northern Ireland Environment Link, last year provided support for two allotment projects.

Councils already have powers to provide allotments and many do, and so my Department has not considered imposing a Statutory Obligation on Councils to provide them.

Litter: Fixed Penalty Notices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued for littering in each council, in each of the last two years; (ii) how much did this accrue in fines; (iii) how many fines were unpaid; and (iii) how many required court action.

(AQW 25832/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department obtains statistical information on fixed penalty notices on an annual basis and this relates to financial years rather than calendar years. The Table attached reflects the information provided by all 26 Councils for the 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years.

The figures for some councils show a smaller number of fines paid compared with fines issued. Apart from straightforward cases where the fine has simply not been paid there may be other factors which explain the difference between some of the figures. In an ideal world every fine would be paid. However, in reality, this will not be the case. On occasion, there will be reasons where to pursue payment would not be in the public interest, for example, where further information about the circumstances of an alleged offender comes to light or where someone that had been issued with a fine had moved and a forwarding address cannot reasonably be obtained.

Council	2011/12				2012/13			
	FPNs Issued 2011/12	FPNs Paid 2011/12	FPN Receipts	Number of Cases Referred for Court Action for Fixed Penalty Non-Payment	FPNs Issued 2012/13	FPNs Paid 2012/13	FPN Receipts	Number of Cases Referred for Court Action for Fixed Penalty Non-Payment
Antrim	30	24	£1,200	0	24	24	£1,200	0
Ards	12	11	£550	0	3	3	£225	0
Armagh	14	13	£625	0	17	12	£1,160	0

Council	2011/12				2012/13			
	FPNs Issued 2011/12	FPNs Paid 2011/12	FPN Receipts	Number of Cases Referred for Court Action for Fixed Penalty Non-Payment	FPNs Issued 2012/13	FPNs Paid 2012/13	FPN Receipts	Number of Cases Referred for Court Action for Fixed Penalty Non-Payment
Ballymena	30	29	£1,450	1	28	28	£1,400	0
Ballymoney	4	3	£150	0	4	1	£50	0
Banbridge	12	9	£450	0	14	8	£580	2
Belfast	1534	1005	£50,250	107	1790	1326	£89,333	326
Carrick-fergus	19	19	£450	0	16	16	£860	0
Castlereagh	26	22	£1,100	4	95	84	£4,200	5
Coleraine	16	12	£600	2	98	82	£4,120	2
Cookstown	12	11	£550	0	22	19	£1,040	1
Craigavon	1046	978	£48,900	11	672	631	£53,760	41
Derry	41	14	£700	0	182	121	£6,400	28
Down	60	46	£2,385	0	289	200	£13,195	17
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1	1	£50	0	4	4	£315	0
Fermanagh	8	5	£250	0	17	7	£350	0
Larne	23	25	£1,250	0	28	21	£1,080	2
Limavady	4	4	£200	0	4	3	£150	1
Lisburn	42	42	£2,100	0	20	19	£1,425	0
Magherafelt	40	36	£1,800	0	45	44	£3,690	0
Moyle	5	4	£200	0	7	7	£375	0
Newry & Mourne	89	62	£3,100	0	92	43	£3,010	0
Newtown-abbey	150	120	£6,000	7	157	135	£7,580	9
North Down	4	4	£200	0	34	29	£1,450	2
Omagh	24	13	£650	2	32	18	£850	3
Strabane	22	22	£1,100	0	48	48	£2,400	0
Totals	3268	2534	£126,260	134	3742	2933	£200,198	439

Local Government Reform: Consultation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many consultations responses his Department received on the reform of local government.

(AQW 25843/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A total of 77 responses were received to the consultation on the Local Government Reform Policy Proposals that issued on 30 November 2010. These responses represented the views of a wide range of interested stakeholders including councils, elected representatives, community and voluntary groups and individuals.

The Departmental Response to the consultation issued on 5 July 2012 with a copy being placed in the Assembly Library.

Carrier Bag Levy: Reduction in Usage

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reduction in the use of plastic bags since the introduction of the Carrier Bag Levy.

(AQW 25845/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The 5 pence single use carrier bag levy was introduced on 8 April 2013 and has been well received by both retailers and shoppers. The levy applies to all single use carrier bags made from plastic, paper or other natural materials. As such retailers are not required to stipulate the material type when making their quarterly returns to the Department and for this reason it is not possible to provide data specifically in relation to plastic bags.

Provisional figures from retailers indicate that 18 million single use bags were dispensed during the period 8 April to 30 June 2013. This retailer data cannot be used to accurately forecast the potential annual reduction, due to a number of factors such as seasonal variation. However, given that an estimated 300 million single use bags were dispensed during the whole of 2012, there is good reason to believe that a substantial reduction will be achieved over the first full year of charging.

I can also advise that figures from several major supermarkets suggest a possible annual reduction of well in excess of 80% in those stores.

My Department intends to produce validated statistics after the first full year of operation.

Local Government Reform: Annual Savings

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much will be saved on an annual basis as a result of the reform of local government.

(AQW 25846/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of local government service delivery, carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could achieve savings of £438 million over twenty-five years.

Local government also examined the potential for savings through its Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme (ICE) and estimated savings of as much as £570m over 25 years.

The Regional Transition Committee commissioned the Finance Working Group in 2012 to develop an up-to-date and accurate analysis of the full costs (transition and transformation) and benefits (including savings) of the reform implementation programme. Since then, local government has worked on this issue, and a response is expected within the coming weeks.

Red Squirrels

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to protect the Red Squirrel population.

(AQW 25847/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In 2008 the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) published an all Ireland Species Action Plan for the red squirrel which identified the main threats to the species and proposed a series of measures which were aimed at conserving the remaining population.

To further the conservation effort and to progress actions contained within the Species Action Plan, NIEA has taken on the role of chair of the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum (NISF). The Forum brings together various organisations in order to develop and deliver best practice in red squirrel conservation.

Since taking on this role, NIEA has helped create, and subsequently supports, 7 local Squirrel Groups, with an eighth Group being developed in South Tyrone during September 2013. These community groups focus on local squirrel issues and work with local stakeholders, providing regular updates to the NI Squirrel Forum. There is an active Squirrel Group in North Down focusing currently on the Ards Peninsula area, chaired by the National Trust at Mount Stewart.

Additionally, my Department has recently joined the other UK Country Agencies to provide funding to support the work of the Moredun Research Institute in Edinburgh who are developing a vaccine to protect red squirrels from the deadly squirrel pox virus that is spread by the non-native greys.

Highway Code: Cyclist Safety

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to review the Highway Code to account for the safety needs of cyclists.

(AQW 25883/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory responsibility under Article 51 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to promote road safety and specifically to revise and make available the Highway Code. Revisions, other than alterations needed following legislative change, are subject to public consultation.

The Highway Code for Northern Ireland was last revised in 2008 in liaison with the Department for Transport and the Driving Standards Agency. The current edition of the Highway Code is very similar to that in Britain, containing a similar number of 'Rules' in the same order, supported by the same illustrations.

The Code is revised when necessary to provide up to date advice to road users. The situation is similar in Britain and colleagues from both jurisdictions work closely on any of the changes being adopted as well as the timing / publication of revisions. There are no plans either in Northern Ireland or Britain to conduct a review at this time.

The current edition of the Highway Code for Northern Ireland addresses the specific safety needs of cyclists in a number of ways. Recognising that certain road users require extra care, advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, is covered in Rules 204 to 218 of the Code.

A section dedicated to 'Rules for Cyclists' includes information on issues such as appropriate clothing and lighting as well as advice when cycling on cycle routes, cycle tracks, cycle lanes and bus lanes. The correct procedures to be followed at road junctions, roundabouts and crossing the road are also covered alongside other important safety requirements (Rules 59 to 82).

A further section entitled 'You and your bicycle' considers some of the factors that will help make sure that you feel confident of your ability to ride safely on the road. This advice can be found in Annex 1 of the Code (page 118).

I am satisfied that the current edition of the Highway Code for Northern Ireland provides all road users, including cyclists, with detailed guidance that will prepare them for the demands of today's roads. There is no doubt, if all road users know and follow the advice in the Code, many collisions would be avoided and the Road to Zero road deaths would be advanced.

Tyres: Disposal

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many licences for dealing with waste tyres have been granted to firms, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 25891/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This question has been interpreted as covering facilities which treat or process waste tyres e.g. baling, shredding. It does not include Material Recycling Facilities that have permission to accept and store waste tyres but do not carry out any processing or treatment.

Four licences were granted for the treatment of waste tyres in 2010. Five licences were granted in 2011. Two licences were granted in 2012. There have been no applications in 2013.

Recycling: Tyres

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the methods used to recycle tyres.

(AQW 25892/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Recycled tyres are those that are reprocessed into products, materials or substances whether for the original or other purposes. Used tyres can be reused or recycled in a number of ways:

- 1 Agricultural use as silage clamps.
- 2 Other temporary uses such as boat fenders and sports safety barriers.
- 3 Landfill engineering, replacing other construction materials, for a lightweight backfill in gas venting systems, leachate collection systems, and operational liners.
- 4 Shredding and crumbing of tyres, to make granulate for the equestrian, garden, sports and child care sectors, and matting products and carpet underlay.
- 5 Tyre bales, for road sub bases, retaining walls, gabions, waterway control, flood control, mud slide and erosion control, soakaways, impact barrier for motorways and racetracks, shock absorption for foundation walls, firing ranges and bunkers and sound barriers along motorways and railways.
- 6 Pyrolysis (although not strictly recycling), heating whole or shredded tires in a reactor vessel containing an oxygen free atmosphere and a heat source. An oily type liquid can be produced and steel is removed from the resultant residual solid material.

These methods and uses may require a waste authorisation issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Peugeot Parts, Portglenone: Recycling

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what information his Department holds on the methods used by Peugeot Parts, Portglenone, to recycle tyres.

(AQW 25893/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The primary use of recycled tyres from PPP Recycling Portglenone is as a Used Tyre Derived Aggregate Replacement forming the leachate drainage layer at Craigmole Landfill just outside Garvagh. A small quantity has also been exported to South Korea for use as a tyre derived fuel in cement production.

Waste Management Licence

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what qualifications must be met to be granted a Waste Management Licence to recycle used tyres.

(AQW 25894/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The relevant certificate of technical competence (CoTC) that an operator must hold, or be in the process of obtaining, to be granted a waste management licence to recycle used tyres, is level 4 in waste management operations: Managing treatment non-hazardous waste.

Dereliction Fund

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the current status of the process for Dereliction Funding that is accessible to councils.

(AQW 25911/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Dereliction Intervention Scheme has been very successful and will be a rolling programme which my department will be bidding to maintain.

Over a 3 year period £3.7m has been allocated to councils to tackle the detrimental impact on amenity caused by derelict or dilapidated buildings and gap sites, particularly on the built environment.

As part of the June monitoring round my department received funding of £1.5 million. This has been allocated to 15 councils to be spent this financial year.

On 23 August 2013, my department received further bids for funding from 16 councils and as a result as part of the October monitoring round has asked for £2 million. My Officials are currently waiting on a decision as to whether this funding will be made available.

Planning: Retrospective Permission

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of times, since 2000, stop notices have been served on (i) mineral extraction sites; and (ii) sites where either a retrospective planning permission had been applied for and was being processed or where retrospective planning permission had been granted.

(AQW 25917/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since 2000, there have been a total of 16 Stop Notices and Temporary Stop Notices on sites dealt with by the Minerals Enforcement team that include extraction and ancillary operations. The information you have requested cannot be readily extracted from the computerised database in relation to retrospective applications.

Planning: EQIA of Breaches at Cavancaw

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 17637/11-15, how many negative Equality Impact Assessment determinations were changed to positive determinations as a result of the review.

(AQW 25920/11-15)

Mr Durkan: AQW 17637/11-15 referred to Environmental Impact Assessments. I have therefore assumed that this question was also intended to ask about Environmental Impact Assessments.

I can confirm that through the review no negative determinations have been changed to positive determinations.

Municipal Waste Figures

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste figures for each of the ARC21 councils over each of the last four years.

(AQW 25935/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As the question does not specify precisely what Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste (LACMW) figures are needed data has been supplied for the following three key performance indicators in the current waste management strategy;

Kpi (e) Percentage of Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste arisings sent for recycling and composting

Kpi (f) Percentage of Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste arisings landfilled

Kpi (j) Total Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste arisings

Other LACMW metrics and / or data for other years are publically reported at http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/waste-home/municipal_data_reporting.htm

Since the 2012 / 13 data are still undergoing validation (publication due late November 2013) the previous 4 reporting years of finalised data have been used.

Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste data 2011 / 12

2011/12	KPI(j)					KPI (e)		KPI(f)
Area	Lac Municipal Waste Arisings (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Composting (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling Rate	Lac Municipal Composting Rate	Lac Municipal Waste Sent For Recycling (Inc Com- posting) As A % Of Lac Municipal Waste Arisings	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled As A % Of Total Lac Municipal Waste Arisings
arc21								
Antrim	35,186	10,321	8,406	29.3%	23.9%	53.2%	16,001	45.5%
Ards	42,435	7,665	8,527	18.1%	20.1%	38.2%	26,080	61.5%
Ballymena	31,926	6,108	6,114	19.1%	19.2%	38.3%	19,693	61.7%
Belfast	148,866	23,607	16,445	15.9%	11.0%	26.9%	105,500	70.9%
Carrickfergus	24,272	7,129	4,049	29.4%	16.7%	46.1%	13,093	53.9%
Castlereagh	31,004	6,413	6,707	20.7%	21.6%	42.3%	17,468	56.3%
Down	32,635	6,079	4,026	18.6%	12.3%	31.0%	22,414	68.7%
Larne	20,396	6,776	4,042	33.2%	19.8%	53.0%	8,743	42.9%
Lisburn	58,637	11,576	11,873	19.7%	20.2%	40.0%	34,481	58.8%
Newtown- abbey	45,212	8,445	9,931	18.7%	22.0%	40.6%	25,689	56.8%
North Down	47,404	12,242	8,748	25.8%	18.5%	44.3%	26,075	55.0%
All arc21	517,972	106,362	88,869	20.5%	17.2%	37.7%	315,238	60.9%

Source: excerpts from Table 3 on page 27 of http://www.doeni.gov.uk/lac_municipal_waste_2011-12.pdf

Notes

- 1 Rates calculated by dividing total tonnage of LAC municipal waste sent for recycling, composting and landfill by total LAC municipal waste arisings.
- 2 The tonnages of recycled (including composted) and landfilled waste may not always equal the waste arisings because the recycling measures were defined to capture outputs from recycling processes which excludes reuse and energy recovery.

Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste data 2010 / 11

2010 / 11	KPI(j)					KPI (e)		KPI(f)
Area	Lac Municipal Waste Arisings (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Composting (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling Rate	Lac Municipal Composting Rate	Lac Municipal Waste Sent For Recycling (Inc Com- posting) As A % Of Lac Municipal Waste Arisings	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled As A % Of Total Lac Municipal Waste Arisings
arc21								
Antrim	35,282	9,676	7,529	27.4%	21.3%	48.8%	17,727	50.2%
Ards	44,686	8,564	8,366	19.2%	18.7%	37.9%	27,629	61.8%
Ballymena	33,576	6,072	5,068	18.1%	15.1%	33.2%	22,432	66.8%

2010 / 11	KPI(j)					KPI (e)		KPI(f)
Area	Lac Municipal Waste Arisings (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Composting (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling Rate	Lac Municipal Composting Rate	Lac Municipal Waste Sent For Recycling (Inc Com- posting) As A % Of Lac Municipal Waste Arisings	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled As A % Of Total Lac Municipal Waste Arisings
Belfast	152,113	23,611	14,913	15.5%	9.8%	25.3%	112,798	74.2%
Carrickfergus	23,467	5,584	4,117	23.8%	17.5%	41.3%	13,767	58.7%
Castlereagh	31,880	6,776	6,375	21.3%	20.0%	41.2%	18,401	57.7%
Down	34,973	6,039	4,212	17.3%	12.0%	29.3%	24,626	70.4%
Larne	20,105	4,004	3,673	19.9%	18.3%	38.2%	12,286	61.1%
Lisburn	61,377	12,426	11,760	20.2%	19.2%	39.4%	36,523	59.5%
Newtown- abbey	46,660	8,463	9,900	18.1%	21.2%	39.4%	28,023	60.1%
North Down	47,878	11,705	8,821	24.4%	18.4%	42.9%	27,139	56.7%
All arc21	531,996	102,920	84,734	19.3%	15.9%	35.3%	341,350	64.2%

Source: excerpts from Table 3 on page 9 of Appendix of http://www.doeni.gov.uk/waste_2011r.pdf

Notes

- 1 Rates calculated by dividing total tonnage of LAC municipal waste sent for recycling, composting and landfill by total LAC municipal waste arisings.
- 2 The tonnages of recycled (including composted) and landfilled waste may not always equal the waste arisings because the recycling measures were defined to capture outputs from recycling processes which excludes reuse and energy recovery.

Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste data 2009 / 10

2009 / 10	KPI(j)					KPI (e)		KPI(f)
Area	Lac Municipal Waste Arisings (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Composting (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling Rate	Lac Municipal Composting Rate	Lac Municipal Waste Sent For Recycling (Inc Com- posting) As A % Of Lac Municipal Waste Arisings	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled As A % Of Total Lac Municipal Waste Arisings
arc21								
Antrim	37,378	11,118	8,008	29.7%	21.4%	51.2%	18,024	48.2%
Ards	45,682	8,605	8,383	18.8%	18.4%	37.2%	28,640	62.7%
Ballymena	34,661	6,307	5,532	18.2%	16.0%	34.2%	22,818	65.8%
Belfast	157,321	24,116	10,994	15.3%	7.0%	22.3%	122,079	77.6%
Carrickfergus	22,308	3,937	2,955	17.6%	13.2%	30.9%	15,416	69.1%
Castlereagh	31,226	6,627	5,254	21.2%	16.8%	38.0%	19,201	61.5%
Down	36,968	6,424	4,037	17.4%	10.9%	28.3%	26,460	71.6%
Larne	20,758	4,071	3,260	19.6%	15.7%	35.3%	13,407	64.6%

2009 / 10	KPI(j)					KPI (e)		KPI(f)
Area	Lac Municipal Waste Arisings (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Composting (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling Rate	Lac Municipal Composting Rate	Lac Municipal Waste Sent For Recycling (Inc Com- posting) As A % Of Lac Municipal Waste Arisings	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled As A % Of Total Lac Municipal Waste Arisings
Lisburn	62,211	12,474	10,209	20.1%	16.4%	36.5%	39,440	63.4%
Newtown- abbey	46,620	7,909	8,187	17.0%	17.6%	34.5%	30,371	65.1%
North Down	48,067	8,960	7,577	18.6%	15.8%	34.4%	28,886	60.1%
All arc21	543,200	100,549	74,395	18.5%	13.7%	32.2%	364,742	67.1%

Source: excerpts from Table 3 on page 9 of Appendix of http://www.doeni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_municipal_waste_management_statistics__annual_report_2009-10r.pdf

Notes

- 1 Rates calculated by dividing total tonnage of LAC municipal waste sent for recycling, composting and landfill by total LAC municipal waste arisings.
- 2 The tonnages of recycled (including composted) and landfilled waste may not always equal the waste arisings because the recycling measures were defined to capture outputs from recycling processes which excludes reuse and energy recovery.

Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste data 2008 / 09

2008 / 09	KPI(j)					KPI (e)		KPI(f)
Area	Lac Municipal Waste Arisings (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Composting (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Dry Recycling Rate	Lac Municipal Composting Rate	Lac Municipal Waste Sent For Recycling (Inc Com- posting) As A % Of Lac Municipal Waste Arisings	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled (Tonnes)	Lac Municipal Waste Landfilled As A % Of Total Lac Municipal Waste Arisings
arc21								
Antrim	37,304	10,304	8,189	27.62%	21.95%	49.6%	18,811	50.4%
Ards	46,238	7,472	7,214	16.16%	15.60%	31.8%	31,552	68.2%
Ballymena	35,409	7,404	5,112	20.91%	14.44%	35.3%	22,890	64.6%
Belfast	158,443	24,825	10,037	15.67%	6.33%	22.0%	123,581	78.0%
Carrickfergus	22,732	3,656	2,793	16.08%	12.28%	28.4%	16,284	71.6%
Castlereagh	31,795	6,747	5,020	21.22%	15.79%	37.0%	19,678	61.9%
Down	38,339	6,506	3,855	16.97%	10.06%	27.0%	31,727	82.8%
Larne	20,738	4,246	2,957	20.48%	14.26%	34.7%	13,666	65.9%
Lisburn	62,848	12,505	7,961	19.90%	12.67%	32.6%	42,355	67.4%
Newtown- abbey	48,806	8,646	7,382	17.72%	15.12%	32.8%	32,778	67.2%
North Down	50,400	8,701	7,741	17.26%	15.36%	32.6%	31,068	61.6%
All arc21	553,054	101,012	68,260	18.26%	12.34%	30.6%	384,391	69.5%

Source: excerpts from Tables on page 33-34 of

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/municipal_waste_management_report_2008-09.pdf

Notes

- 1 Rates calculated by dividing total tonnage of LAC municipal waste sent for recycling, composting and landfill by total LAC municipal waste arisings.
- 2 The tonnages of recycled (including composted) and landfilled waste may not always equal the waste arisings because the recycling measures were defined to capture outputs from recycling processes which excludes reuse and energy recovery.

Arc21/Becon

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether there will be waste tonnage commitments made to ARC21/Becon by each of the participating councils.

(AQW 25936/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Whilst the participating councils would be expected to commit waste tonnage, the specific quantities are a matter for arc21, its Bidder and arc21's constituent councils. The Department is not a party to the arc21 procurement and I cannot comment on the commercial aspects of the project.

ARC21/Becon

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether recycling tonnages will have to be diverted to the proposed ARC21/Becon facility to feed the incinerator and ensure its viability.

(AQW 25937/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is not a party to the arc21 procurement and I cannot comment on the commercial aspects of the project.

However the facilities proposed in the arc21 procurement for residual waste treatment are part of the preferred integrated mix of treatment solutions set out in the arc21 Waste Management Plan. This plan accords with the waste hierarchy set out in the EU Waste Framework Directive and includes mechanical biological treatment and energy recovery from incineration.

The proposed facilities are therefore intended to maximise recycling, not to either restrict or reduce it and there is no basis on which the viability of the proposed incinerator would be dependent on material which would otherwise be recycled.

DOE: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 25960/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since 2007 there have been eleven Environment Sector North South Ministerial Council meetings. There have been five Environment Ministerial meetings under the aegis of the British Irish Council.

We do not collate information on other ministerial or official bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC.

East Antrim: Recycling

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the current recycling figures for East Antrim.

(AQW 25994/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not have recycling rate information for the area bordered by the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim. However, recycling rate information is available for the constituent council areas – Carrickfergus, Larne, Moyle and Newtownabbey.

NIEA collates recycling information from local councils on the WasteDataFlow database, and further information on waste arisings and recycling can be found at: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/waste-home/municipal_data_reporting.htm.

The latest annual validated figures available are for 2011/12, however, provisional estimates for 2012/13 are also available but these are subject to further revision until they are fully validated and published in late November 2013.

Council	Household waste1 recycling and composting rate – 2011/12 (validated figures)	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste2 recycling and composting rate – 2011/12 (validated figures)
Carrickfergus Borough Council	40.9%	46.1%

Council	Household waste¹ recycling and composting rate – 2011/12 (validated figures)	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste² recycling and composting rate – 2011/12 (validated figures)
Larne Borough Council	50.8%	53.0%
Moyle District Council	41.2%	38.5%
Newtownabbey Borough Council	43.4%	40.6%

Council	Household waste¹ recycling and composting rate – 2012/13 (provisional estimates)	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste² recycling and composting rate – 2012/13 (provisional estimates)
Carrickfergus Borough Council	39.4%	41.5%
Larne Borough Council	50.1%	52.9%
Moyle District Council	40.8%	38.5%
Newtownabbey Borough Council	45.7%	43.2%

Notes:

- Household waste includes materials collected directly from households (kerbside collections) or taken to bring sites, civic amenity sites or collected by private and voluntary organisations not included elsewhere
- Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste is waste under the control or possession of a district council including non-household sources.

Squirrels

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the estimated population of (i) red squirrels; and (ii) grey squirrels.

(AQW 25997/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As you may be aware accurate population estimates for reclusive wild mammals are difficult to deliver and rely on extrapolations of sighting data and habitat modelling.

In 2008 the Environment & Heritage Service, the predecessor to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), along with National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Republic of Ireland, published a document entitled 'All Ireland Species Action Plan - Red Squirrel', that cited a figure of around 40,000 for the red squirrel population in the whole of Ireland. This was based on figures collated by Dr. Colin Lawton at the National University of Ireland, Galway. A Queen's University project by Dennis O'Teagana in 1999 had previously given an estimated figure of 10,000 red squirrels across Northern Ireland.

The 2008 'All Ireland Species Action Plan - Red Squirrel' cited that there were at least 250,000 grey squirrels on the island of Ireland, if we project that a quarter of these are in Northern Ireland then an estimate of 60,000 – 70 000 would seem to be proportionate. There is an estimate of 2.5 million grey squirrels across the UK cited by Scottish Natural Heritage amongst others.

Currently the NIEA is working with members of the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum to obtain up to date presence or absence data for both grey and red squirrels across Northern Ireland.

Vehicle Licensing: Reminders

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons for the policy of no longer issuing reminders to all vehicle owners when their vehicle licensing duty is due for renewal.

(AQW 26004/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The issue of a reminder notice is not a statutory requirement but is a concession which was introduced in 1987 for the convenience of customers. There are no plans at present to cease the issue of a renewal reminder notice to customers in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to provide the volume of penalties that relate to the non issue of a reminder notice, however, a breakdown of the overall total number of late licensing penalties issued in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

Period	Volume
1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013	73,485
1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012	59,189

Period	Volume
1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011	61,501
Total	194,175

Note: Figures were sourced from DVA information systems and are not validated DOE/DVA Official Statistics.

Renewal reminder notices are not issued on a random basis. A monthly process extracts those vehicle records where the tax is due to expire and issues reminders to customers against set criteria to ensure the maximum number of keepers who are due to relicense their vehicle receive a renewal reminder. On average, approximately 110,000 reminders are issued to Northern Ireland customers every month.

Vehicle Licensing: Fines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment how many fines have been issued to drivers for failure to renew their vehicle licensing duty disc since the introduction of the policy to no longer issue reminders to all drivers.

(AQW 26005/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The issue of a reminder notice is not a statutory requirement but is a concession which was introduced in 1987 for the convenience of customers. There are no plans at present to cease the issue of a renewal reminder notice to customers in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to provide the volume of penalties that relate to the non issue of a reminder notice, however, a breakdown of the overall total number of late licensing penalties issued in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

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Renewal reminder notices are not issued on a random basis. A monthly process extracts those vehicle records where the tax is due to expire and issues reminders to customers against set criteria to ensure the maximum number of keepers who are due to relicense their vehicle receive a renewal reminder. On average, approximately 110,000 reminders are issued to Northern Ireland customers every month.

Vehicle Licensing: Fines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment how many fines have been issued to people for failure to renew their vehicle licensing duty in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26006/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The issue of a reminder notice is not a statutory requirement but is a concession which was introduced in 1987 for the convenience of customers. There are no plans at present to cease the issue of a renewal reminder notice to customers in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to provide the volume of penalties that relate to the non issue of a reminder notice, however, a breakdown of the overall total number of late licensing penalties issued in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

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Vehicle Licensing: Reminders

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether reminders to renew vehicle licensing duty are no longer issued, or if they are issued on a random basis.

(AQW 26007/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The issue of a reminder notice is not a statutory requirement but is a concession which was introduced in 1987 for the convenience of customers. There are no plans at present to cease the issue of a renewal reminder notice to customers in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to provide the volume of penalties that relate to the non issue of a reminder notice, however, a breakdown of the overall total number of late licensing penalties issued in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

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Total	194,175

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Renewal reminder notices are not issued on a random basis. A monthly process extracts those vehicle records where the tax is due to expire and issues reminders to customers against set criteria to ensure the maximum number of keepers who are due to relicence their vehicle receive a renewal reminder. On average, approximately 110,000 reminders are issued to Northern Ireland customers every month.

MOT: Reminders

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether MOT reminders are still issued as standard to all vehicle owners.

(AQW 26008/11-15)

Mr Durkan: DVA issues MOT reminder letters to the registered keepers of all vehicles subject to mandatory vehicle testing. These reminder letters are dispatched by post approximately seven weeks before the vehicle is due to be tested.

Horses: Traffic Accidents

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department is working with the equestrian community to prevent road traffic accidents involving horses.

(AQW 26021/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

The Department consulted extensively with a wide range of stakeholders in developing the Road Safety Strategy to 2020. Along with other road user groups, the consultation targeted groups representative of horse riders to seek their input. The British Horse Society and the Equine Council for Northern Ireland were among those who responded representing the interests of horse riders. As a result of the responses received, the following medium term action measure was included in the Strategy:

AM 150: We will extend our road safety website to include new approaches and further advisory information; for example, to include information on horse riders and their safety.

Many of the action measures included in the Strategy contribute towards the prevention of road traffic collisions generally, including those involving horses and riders.

My officials are currently working on reviewing and updating a suite of leaflets to be published in hard copy and on NI Direct. The leaflet 'Horse Sense for Riders and Motorists' is one of these of leaflets currently being revised, and officials in my Department have been working in partnership with the British Horse Society to ensure the correctness of information and advice contained in this leaflet. The leaflet has recently completed its final quality assurance process and will be going to print shortly.

The Department's most recent road safety campaign 'Share the Road to Zero' launched in April of this year. The core message of this campaign is that if we all share the road, shouldn't we all share the responsibility. The opening scene shows several road user groups and the main crash scene takes place on a rural road and involves a driver moving out to avoid a horse rider. This campaign encourages all road users to act appropriately on the roads. The online element of this campaign asks road users to sign up to a pledge to support the ambition of zero road deaths. Individuals can go to www.sharetheroadtozero.com and identify which road user group they belong to, including horse riders, and they in turn receive road safety advice via email, Facebook and twitter.

When the campaign launched, a local representative from the British Horse Society contacted officials to express their appreciation of the campaign and showed their support by pledging the organisation to share the Road to Zero.

All road users are provided with detailed guidance through the Highway Code for Northern Ireland which contains rules, information and advice that helps prepare road users for the demands of today's roads. Knowing and applying these rules could significantly reduce road casualties. The current edition of the Highway Code includes extensive advice that drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including horse riders, with extra care and attention. It also dedicates a section to 'Rules about animals' that includes specific information and advice for horse riders (rules 49 to 55).

It describes the legal requirement for children under the age of 14 to wear a securely fastened helmet and encourages all others to do likewise. It encourages all riders to wear appropriate clothing at all times and to use appropriate lighting where a person is riding or leading a horse on the road at night. Rules 52 to 55 set out advice on the proper riding of a horse on a road that is shared with other forms of traffic.

Other road users, including motorists, motor cyclists and cyclists, are advised on how to overtake horse riders safely (Rules 163 and 215) and on how to approach a roundabout safely (Rule 187). They are encouraged to be particularly careful of horses and to treat all horses as a potential hazard as they can be unpredictable despite the efforts of their rider.

In addition the Driver & Vehicle Agency has developed in consultation with the Equine Council for Northern Ireland and the British Horse Society a specific guide for the use of Horseboxes and horse trailers on the road. The guide has been developed to clarify the legal requirements in relation to operating horseboxes, whether they are trailers or rigid vehicles. DVA officials have also agreed to attend a series of meetings with the equine sector to discuss the use of these vehicles on the road.

Northern Ireland has made considerable progress over the past number of years seeing the tragic and unnecessary loss of life due to road traffic collisions reduce considerable but there is still more work to be done. Every single life lost on our roads is one life too many. I believe we should all be striving as a community to reduce further all deaths and serious injuries on our roads, with the ultimate ambition of zero road deaths, where any death is unacceptable. This is a challenging but achievable objective if we all work together and take responsibility for our own safety and the safety of others. I encourage every road user to take the pledge and 'Share the Road to Zero'.

Vehicle Licensing: Reminders

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment how many people, who were not issued with a reminder to renew their Vehicle Licensing Duty, subsequently received a fine.

(AQW 26055/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The issue of a reminder notice is not a statutory requirement but is a concession which was introduced in 1987 for the convenience of customers. There are no plans at present to cease the issue of a renewal reminder notice to customers in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to provide the volume of penalties that relate to the non issue of a reminder notice, however, a breakdown of the overall total number of late licensing penalties issued in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

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Renewal reminder notices are not issued on a random basis. A monthly process extracts those vehicle records where the tax is due to expire and issues reminders to customers against set criteria to ensure the maximum number of keepers who are due to relicence their vehicle receive a renewal reminder. On average, approximately 110,000 reminders are issued to Northern Ireland customers every month.

Planning: Rural Areas

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he will take to make it easier for rural dwellers to secure planning permission for building family homes in the countryside.

(AQO 4608/11-15)

Mr Durkan: PPS 21 already offers considerable development opportunities for rural dwellers wishing to build a dwelling in the countryside. It does this by providing for: replacement dwellings; the conversion and reuse of non-residential buildings as dwellings; new dwellings within an existing cluster or ribbon of buildings; social and affordable housing schemes; development within designated Dispersed Rural Communities; a dwelling to meet compelling personal or domestic circumstances; and a policy Dwellings on Farms.

However, the member will be aware that my predecessor undertook a review into how PPS 21 was being applied in practice. This work promoted a flexible approach to decision making in line with the content and substance of existing policy. I agree with my predecessor that PPS 21 is working much more effectively now and that a more practical and flexible approach is being adopted by planners to make it easier for rural dwellers to secure planning permission for family homes.

The Member will also be aware that I am undertaking a comprehensive consolidation and review of planning policy as part of the overall programme of planning reform. This will reconfigure existing policy provisions, including PPS21, into a single 'Strategic Planning Policy Statement' that will be more appropriate for the introduction of a new two tier planning system in 2015. It is intended that the consolidated strategic planning policy statement will be more strategic in focus, shorter and clearer.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Jobs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department has taken to secure the jobs of the 300 Driver and Vehicle Agency staff in Coleraine.

(AQO 4611/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As you know, vehicle licensing is delivered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), under an agreement between the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport. DVLA, the Agency in Swansea responsible for vehicle licensing services across the UK, is nearing completion of a project to integrate the separate NI and GB computer systems, to produce an integrated system for vehicle licensing services across the UK. The DVLA is proposing to use the integration of the two computer systems as an opportunity to transfer all the work not done online or in Post Offices to Swansea and to terminate the agreement with the Department of the Environment. The consequences of this proposal would be the closure of all vehicle licensing offices in Northern Ireland with a loss of over 300 public jobs and a catastrophic impact on the local economy, particularly in Coleraine.

My predecessor, Alex Attwood, robustly opposed DVLA's centralisation plans throughout his period in office, eventually, after protracted negotiations with London, securing a commitment to a public consultation on the proposals. The consultation was published on 17th July and closed on 11th September.

Since coming to office, I have also vigorously challenged the DVLA proposal on centralisation and I will continue to tirelessly campaign to protect local services and save local jobs.

I wrote to all Northern Ireland MPs, MLAs and Chief Executive Officers of District Councils seeking their support and urging them to avail of the opportunity to respond to the consultation. I strongly believe that the DVLA consultation presents a one-sided case that promotes centralisation without adequately exploring other options. I arranged for all recipients to receive a copy of a critique of the DVLA consultation documentation 'An appraisal of the DVLA Consultation Documents' to provide them with sufficient information to formulate an informed response to the DVLA consultation.

An independent economic impact assessment was commissioned which was carried out by Oxford Economics. The report estimates that the aggregate impact of the proposed closure of all vehicle licensing offices in Northern Ireland would be the loss of 523 jobs and an annual loss to the economy of £11.2m in wages and £22.4m overall in gross value added (the common measure for economic activity).

I formally responded to the DVLA consultation on 6 September in which I set out clearly my rejection of the centralisation proposals on economic, social and customer service grounds, namely:

- The flawed process of options appraisal and the inadequate consultation process;
- The negative economic impact of the loss of funding and the associated jobs, accentuated by the "multiplier effect";
- The negative impact on the local labour market;
- The disproportionate impact on NI, compared to the larger economy of GB;
- The resultant lower standards of service and the removal of choice, especially from older and other more vulnerable customers;
- The loss of the benefits of DVA's exemplary record of very high standards of performance and customer service;
- The impact on staff; and
- The failure to identify the best option.

I also pointed out to Stephen Hammond the better option of continuing to use DVA to deliver services to local motorists and to supplement this work by transferring work for UK-wide customers to DVA. I have sought a meeting with Stephen Hammond to discuss this matter before he reaches a final decision.

I have also visited the local licensing office in Derry and met with staff in Coleraine to hear first-hand the impact of the centralisation proposals are having on staff morale and to reassure staff that every possible step will be taken to protect the jobs in Coleraine and the local offices.

There has been a high level of support for the campaign to oppose the centralisation of vehicle licensing services in Swansea, with a number of MPs, MLAs and District Councils responding to the DVLA consultation. In addition, Laurence Robertson, MP, Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has written to the Secretary of State for Transport pointing out that, at their meeting on 4 September 2013, the members of the Committee agreed that a powerful case had been made for the issue to be re-examined as the economic situation in NI justifies applying different criteria, when considering rationalisation of jobs, than those applied to GB. Mr Robertson also pointed out that the DVLA proposal is another example of how centralisation

proposals by GB departments always act against the interests of NI and how NI is never considered as a suitable base for UK-wide business.

A motion has been tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday 24th September, and I would urge all political representatives to make their views known and to exert all possible influence to protect the local vehicle licensing service.

Road Safety Strategy

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the implementation of the measures contained in the Road Safety Strategy.

(AQO 4612/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020 includes 221 Action Measures. A Strategy Delivery Board monitors and reports on progress on the implementation of those measures. This Board is chaired by DOE and comprises organisations with responsibility for road safety including, DRD, PSNI, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service. I also chair a Ministerial Road Safety Group and a Road Safety Forum.

Implementation of each action measure remains the responsibility of the organisation with lead authority in the relevant area. Progress is reported primarily through an Annual Report, with interim updates provided to the Environment Committee.

The latest update was provided to the Committee in July and covers progress up to 30 April 2013. This showed that 64 measures are either complete or embedded in business as usual, representing 29% of the overall total of 221 measures. Looking just at the 74 short term measures planned for completion by the end of 2013, 56 (76%) are either complete or embedded in business as usual. The remainder are on track for completion by the end of the year.

I have placed in the Assembly library copies of the first Annual Report for 2011 and the update from which the above figures are drawn. These documents, which provide information on the implementation of each of the 221 measures, are also available on the Department's website.

The 2012 Annual Report and a further progress update will be available before the end of 2013.

Mobouy Road: Illegal Dump

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department is aware of any illegal dump in Europe which is larger than that at the Mobouy Road; (ii) to provide further details; and (iii) how the scale of the illegal dump at Mobouy Road compares to other illegal dumps which have been discovered in Europe.

(AQW 26286/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Illegal waste management is a serious problem in a number of developed countries. In the European Union I understand that individual member states record details of illegal landfills discovered in their territory. My Department does not hold this information.

Environmental Information Regulations 2004

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 25615/11-15, and given that he specified the exception in regulation 12(4)(d) in the refusal, to detail the estimated time in which the information will be finished or completed as directed by the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, Part 3, Regulation 14(4).

(AQW 26361/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My response to AQW 25615/11-15 indicated that there was an ongoing audit of minerals planning application files which had not yet been completed. The report relating to this audit is currently at draft stage and will be finalised within the next month following consideration by management.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Ulster Bank

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the effect of the Ulster Bank's Corporate Responsibility Group within Ulster Bank on local business.

(AQW 25426/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I am aware that the Ulster Bank as part of its corporate and social responsibility activities supports events aimed at encouraging social enterprise in Northern Ireland.

However, my Department has not made an assessment of the impact of these activities on business locally.

Judicial Cases: Cost

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel pursuant to AQW 25071/11-15 to detail (i) why the department cannot answer part (i) and (ii) of that question; (ii) the cost of the most expensive legal case which the Department lost during since 2007 and (iii) why his Department does not record and disaggregate the costs of lost judicial cases for public scrutiny. (AQW 25745/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The disparate nature of the department's functions and the litigation brought against it together with the volume of cases, make the keeping of statistics in relation to cost and outcome, a task which would not make the resources required to undertake it a productive use of public money.

Emigration

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) for his assessment of the impact of rising emigration on the unemployment rate; and (ii) to quantify the current level of emigration among the working age population. (AQW 25796/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS based unemployment rate for the period April to June 2012 was estimated to be 7.6% of the economically active or 66,000 people. It is not possible to quantify how many persons who emigrated from Northern Ireland in 2012 would otherwise have become unemployed.

Table 1 shows the level of migration among the working age population (16-64), both in and out of Northern Ireland by origin/destination for the year ending mid-2012.

Table 1: Migration of Persons Aged 16-64, by origin/destination, for the year ending mid-2012

	Persons Aged 16-64 at mid-2012
Inflows from Great Britain	8,468
Outflows to Great Britain	10,534
Net GB Migration	-2,066
Inflows from outside UK	10,355
Outflows to outside UK	10,352
Net International Migration	3
Total Inflows	18,823
Total Outflows	20,886
Total Net Migration	-2,063

Gross Domestic Product

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide Gross Domestic Product figures for the last five consecutive years for which data is available. (AQW 25825/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The production of estimates of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the responsibility of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). However, GDP figures are not produced on a regional basis.

Estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) are available for Northern Ireland from the ONS Regional Accounts. Table 1 attached shows the GVA for NI for the last 5 years for which data is available.

Table 1: Headline workplace based GVA, at current basic prices for NI 2007-2011 (£ million)

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
28,310	28,607	27,969	29,155	29,870

Source: ONS Regional Gross Value Added (income approach), December 2012 release

Flags: Equality Impact Assessment

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to departmental buildings (i) if he intends to fly the union flag at buildings that have not flown it before, and if so, at which sites; (ii) if the decision to erect new flagpoles was subject to equality screening and an Equality Impact Assessment; and (iii) if members of staff were consulted over new flagpoles being erected.

(AQW 25874/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I intend to fly the Union flag, on designated days, at the following Departmental buildings where it previously did not fly:- College Street, Rosepark, Victoria Hall, Clare House and Goodwood House.

No equality screening was carried out.

No consultation was undertaken with employees in relation to the proposal to erect flag poles and fly the Union flag on office buildings where DFP has premises responsibility.

Special Advisers: Code of Conduct

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel pursuant to the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act 2013 to detail (i) whether a Code of Conduct for Special Advisers has been issued; and (ii) when will such be laid before the Assembly.
(AQW 25899/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Code of Conduct for Special Advisers has been issued and was laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly on 20 August 2013.

Life Expectancy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current life expectancy for (i) males; and (ii) females; and how does this compares with (i) England; (ii) Scotland; (iii) Wales and (iv) the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 25918/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Table 1 overleaf shows the latest available figures for life expectancy at birth for males & females in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

Table 1: Period Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex and Country

Country	Males	Females
Northern Ireland	77.4	81.8
England ¹	78.7	82.7
Scotland ²	76.1	80.6
Wales ¹	77.8	82.0
Republic of Ireland ³	76.8	81.6

1 Latest available figures are 2009/2011, Office of National Statistics

2 Latest available figures are 2009/2011, National Records of Scotland

3 Latest available figures are 2005/2007, Central Statistics Office, Ireland. These are calculated using 2006 Census-based population estimates.

Life Expectancy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail life expectancy broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) council area.

(AQW 25922/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Life expectancy figures for Northern Ireland are currently produced by the Office for National Statistics. Figures for areas within Northern Ireland are currently only produced at local government district level, therefore data by constituency is unavailable.

Table 1 shows 2008/10 figures for life expectancy at birth by local government district area. These are the latest available local data and will be revised to take account of updated local area population statistics from the Census.

Table 1: Period Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex and Local Government District, 2008/2010

Local Government District	Male	Female
Antrim	78.1	81.2
Ards	78.5	82.3
Armagh	76.5	81.7
Ballymena	78.4	82.7
Ballymoney	78.3	82.2
Banbridge	78.2	82.3

Local Government District	Male	Female
Belfast	73.9	79.8
Carrickfergus	77.4	81.8
Castlereagh	78.1	82.6
Coleraine	77.6	82.3
Cookstown	76.1	82.4
Craigavon	77.0	82.2
Derry	75.5	79.9
Down	78.7	82.0
Dungannon	77.5	81.0
Fermanagh	77.7	82.5
Larne	76.8	80.9
Limavady	76.6	83.2
Lisburn	78.0	81.6
Magherafelt	79.4	82.6
Moyle	78.7	81.2
Newry and Mourne	76.8	81.1
Newtownabbey	78.0	81.9
North Down	79.0	82.2
Omagh	77.3	82.8
Strabane	77.4	80.9

DFP: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many meetings have been held at (i) ministerial and (ii) official level with the corresponding Minister/Department under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements, or, otherwise, in (a) the rest of the UK; and (b) the Republic of Ireland since May 2007.

(AQW 25948/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Since 2007 there have been one hundred and forty six North South Ministerial Council meetings, including twelve in Plenary and seven in Institutional format, which have been attended by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

There have been twenty eight meetings under the aegis of the British Irish Council attended by Ministers, including twelve at Summit level.

My Department does not collate information on other bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC involving myself or officials.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the measured Gross Domestic Product for the last five years for which data is available.

(AQW 25957/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The production of estimates of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the responsibility of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). However, GDP figures are not produced on a regional basis.

Estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) are available for Northern Ireland from the ONS Regional Accounts. Table 1 below shows the GVA for NI for the last 5 years for which data are available.

Table 1: Headline workplace based GVA, at current basic prices for NI 2007-2011 (£ million)

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
28,310	28,607	27,969	29,155	29,870

Source: ONS Regional Gross Value Added (income approach), December 2012 release

Gross Domestic Product

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the measured Gross Domestic Product for an employee in the (i) private sector; and (ii) public sector, for the last five years for which data is available.

(AQW 25958/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures are not produced on a regional basis. Annual estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. GVA is an estimate of the value of goods and services produced by a country or region in a given time period. However, it is not possible to split GVA into public and private elements as the data is produced for the whole economy and industry section level only.

Working-age Population

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the ratio of working age to total population for the last five years for which data is available.

(AQW 25984/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The population made up from males aged 16 to 64, and females aged 16 to 59, was previously referred to as the "working age population". From April 2010 however, the state pensionable age for women has started to increase to equal that of men over the next decade. As a result, an increasing proportion of the female population aged 60 and 61 can be classified as working age for the years 2010 to 2012.

The table overleaf shows for each mid-year 2008 to 2012, (A) the total population, (B) the number of males aged 16 to 64 and females aged 16 to 59, and (C) the working age population accounting for the change in the state pensionable age for women, as well as the ratio of working age to total population for both the previous (B/A) and current (C/A) definition of working age.

	Total Population (A)	Males 16-64, Females 16-59 (B)	Working Age Population (C)	Ratio per 1,000 population (B/A*1,000)	Ratio per 1,000 population (C/A*1,000)
2008	1,779,152	1,106,162	1,106,162	622	622
2009	1,793,333	1,113,095	1,113,095	621	621
2010	1,804,833	1,117,481	1,118,961	619	620
2011	1,814,318	1,119,836	1,125,942	617	621
2012	1,823,634	1,121,327	1,132,165	615	621

Project Bank Accounts

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to detail the construction projects which will involve the use of Project Bank Accounts; and (ii) to explain how such an approach will protect sub-contractors from possible risk of non-payment.

(AQW 26078/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Project Bank Accounts will be used on all appropriate construction works contracts procured by Central Procurement Directorate where the contract value exceeds £1million and there are significant subcontract opportunities.

To date, Central Procurement Directorate has awarded one construction contract with a Project Bank Account and another is scheduled to be awarded within the next month. A further six contracts which include provision for Project Bank Accounts are currently being procured.

The use of a Project Bank Account will mean that the subcontractors, to be paid through the Account, will receive payment at the same time as the main contractor. A Project Bank Account's trust status also means that such payments would be protected in the event of insolvency of the main contractor. However, work completed by a subcontractor since the last contract valuation, but which has not yet been paid into the Project Bank Account, would not be protected.

On the initial projects, only key subcontractors will be paid through the Project Bank Account. However, on subsequent projects, it is expected that the requirement will be extended to include first tier subcontractors with a subcontract valued at over 1% of the main contract price.

As well as leading on the introduction of Project Bank Accounts for the projects which it procures, CPD is also preparing a Procurement Guidance Note on Project Bank Accounts. This Guidance Note, which is scheduled to be considered by the Procurement Board in November 2013, would extend the use of Project Bank Accounts across the departments.

Recruitment: Religious Breakdown

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) applicants and (ii) appointees to the Civil Service in the last 12 months broken down by; (a) Protestant; (b) Roman Catholic; and (c) non determined applicants.

(AQW 26118/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The information requested is not yet available for the last 12 months. The latest information available is for the calendar year 2012 as part of the NICS Annual Report on Recruitment for 2012. This is in the public domain and is available on the NICS recruitment web-site at <https://irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net/pages/content.aspx?Page=annual-reports>.

Public Sector Reform Division

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to detail the targets set for the public sector reform division; and (ii) whether any of these targets are time bound.

(AQW 26195/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Sector Reform Division was established to provide support to NI departments in the implementation of reform across the public sector as well as to encourage innovation in service delivery by identifying and disseminating successful examples of best practice.

It is important to note that NI departments will retain responsibility for the planning and implementation of reform, including the achievement of the associated targets relating to improvements in service delivery and realisation of cost savings.

A work programme is currently being developed for the Public Sector Reform Division with a focus on examining how innovation can be driven forward across the public sector. The performance of the Division will be assessed in terms of its achievement of the actions contained within this work programme.

Rate Relief Scheme: Stud Farms

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to introduce a Rates Relief scheme for Stud Farms, in line with the arrangements in England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 26224/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department is not actively considering rate relief for stud farms.

As is the case with any call for new rate reliefs for business it is for the policy competent Department to consider in the first instance and in the case of stud farm relief this would be DARD. Indeed, Ministerial correspondence confirmed that position some years ago following the publication of the Equine Strategy back in 2007.

As matters stand my Department has not received any kind of persuasive case to justify the introduction of rate relief for stud farms in this part of the UK. Although I am fairly open minded about it, any case must establish need, properly assess the economic benefit, be affordable, consider alternative support measures, align with Programme for Government priorities and last but not least overcome EU State Aid Rules. These rules are particularly strict in this area and may inhibit any new schemes of this nature, notwithstanding that they already exist in other parts of the UK.

Unemployment: Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of unemployed people under the age of twenty five in the Fermanagh District Council area in each quarter for the last six years.

(AQW 26225/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and estimates of the number of unemployed people under the age of twenty-five in Fermanagh District Council Area are not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around the estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The following table is sourced instead to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons aged under 25 claiming unemployment related benefits at February, May, August and November of each year since 2007.

Table 1: Claimant count for people aged under 25 in Fermanagh District Council Area

Date	Number
February 2007	170
May 2007	125
August 2007	180
November 2007	155
February 2008	185
May 2008	160
August 2008	240
November 2008	275
February 2009	375

Date	Number
May 2009	400
August 2009	465
November 2009	425
February 2010	460
May 2010	430
August 2010	525
November 2010	440
February 2011	495
May 2011	425
August 2011	500
November 2011	485
February 2012	535
May 2012	440
August 2012	565
November 2012	490
February 2013	525
May 2013	450
August 2013	475

DHSSPS: Additional Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the additional funding awarded to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety during in year monitoring within each of the past six financial years.

(AQW 26284/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below shows the additional in-year allocations made to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) over the last six years.

Table: In-year Allocations to DHSSPS (£m)

Year	Non Ringfenced Resource	Capital
2008-09	20.0	0.0
2009-10	31.6	17.0
2010-11	30.0	8.1
2011-12	20.0	5.0
2012-13	57.0	15.5
2013-14 (to date)	10.6	44.0

It is important to note that Budget 2008-11 included provision that DHSSPS would have first call on available resources in year up to £20 million per year. This commitment was honoured and these in-year allocations are included in the table above. The table also includes allocations made in relation to Swine Flu (net of the amount returned to donating departments), allocations in respect of equal pay settlements and allocations from the Invest to Save fund.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Childcare: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the childcare services and providers in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 25721/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The website, www.familysupportni.gov.uk, lists all registered childcare providers across Northern Ireland. Registered childminders are also included on the website apart from a small number who have requested that their details are withheld on security grounds.

The following table details the number of registered childcare providers in the North Down constituency.

Childminders	276
Afterschools	6
Creches	2
Day Nurseries	18
Playgroups	20

Nutrition Strategy and Healthy Ageing Agenda

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the withdrawal of the community meals service in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust as no older person has met the referral criteria, what assurances he can give that there will be a continuation of a viable, accessible community meals service to support the Department's Nutrition Strategy and healthy ageing agenda in Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 25747/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has informed my Department that it has not withdrawn the community meals service. The Trust continues to provide a comprehensive domiciliary care service, including a meals service throughout the Trust. Service Users access nutritional support through a range of different sources, namely meals on wheels and attendance at luncheon clubs and Day Centres.

In addition, there is increasing availability of ready meals which individuals and/or family members may prefer to access, which is independent of the Trust.

The Trust has advised that it will always provide help where someone cannot heat, plate or needs help to eat a meal because of their disability or frailty and where they have no other source of support.

Physiotherapists and Podiatrists

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the changes required to existing legislation and health service regulations to enable physiotherapists and podiatrists to practice as independent prescribers; and (ii) the timescale for those changes to be enacted through the Assembly.

(AQW 25748/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- On 20th August 2013, new UK wide legislation - **Human medicines (Amendments) Regulation 2013** - came into force. This allows suitably qualified & registered Physiotherapists & Podiatrists across the UK to independently prescribe medication for their patients.
- Physiotherapists & Podiatrists who wish to independently prescribe will have to undertake additional training approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and be annotated on the HCPC Register. They will only be able to prescribe relevant to their job role.
- Changes will be required to the Pharmaceutical Services Regulations (NI) 1997 to allow prescriptions prescribed by Independent Prescribers to be dispensed in Northern Ireland and also to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002. These sub-ordinate legislation changes will be taken through the Assembly in due course.

Staff: Disciplinary Issues

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, over the last three years, (i) how many Health and Social Care Trust staff have been disciplined under Trust guidelines for misusing their work phones; (ii) of these staff, how many were (a) dismissed; (b) disciplined; (c) given the opportunity to repay the money; and (iii) what were the sums involved.

(AQW 25760/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) 5 Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust staff have been disciplined under Trust guidelines for misusing their work phones;
- (ii) of these:
 - (a) 3 were dismissed;
 - (b) 2 were disciplined;
 - (c) none were given the opportunity to repay the money; and
- (iii) the sums involved were negligible.

Childcare: South Antrim

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the childcare services and providers in the South Antrim constituency.

(AQW 25787/11-15)

Mr Poots: The website, www.familysupportni.gov.uk, lists all registered childcare providers across Northern Ireland. Registered childminders are also included on the website apart from a small number who have requested that their details are withheld on security grounds.

The following table details the number of registered childcare providers in the South Antrim constituency.

Childminders	279
Afterschools	12
Creches	3
Day Nurserys	36
Playgroups	29

Learning Disabilities: Armagh and Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what engagement takes place between the Southern Health and Social Care Trust and parents, carers and people with learning disabilities to notify them of Daytime Opportunities and Training Services Programmes in Armagh and Dungannon; and whether there is scope for this communication to be broadened to allow maximum uptake and inclusion.

(AQW 25833/11-15)

Mr Poots: Engagement with parents, carers and people with learning disabilities about day time opportunities and training service programmes in Armagh and Dungannon takes place at various levels - including at annual review stage, ad hoc meetings with members of the adult community learning disability team and/or community access officer, and also through group discussion.

Contact may be made through transitions co-ordinators, community access officers and day care staff who provide individuals with an early opportunity to discuss options and receive information in a variety of ways – including telephone or face to face meetings which include transition and review meetings. In an attempt to meet each individual's assessed needs, opportunities are also offered to visit venues and activities, to discuss suitability and compatibility and to engage in taster sessions.

Trust staff liaise with training providers to negotiate and co-ordinate training opportunities and to highlight options of potential interest to individuals. Community Access Officers hold focus groups and information sharing sessions which may result in referrals to the voluntary sector. To further maximise uptake and inclusion, there are also plans to run a number of information sessions in local areas for people with disabilities and their carers to highlight the range of community opportunities available.

Hospitals: Complaints about Food

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department collates complaints about hospital food as part of the information it collects from the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 25853/11-15)

Mr Poots: Complaints regarding the quality of hospital food are currently recorded under the category Hotel/Support/Security Services on the DHSSPS information collection; although, it is not possible to disaggregate this information. This category includes all complaints referring to ancillary or support services e.g. portering, facilities, catering etc. It also includes complaints regarding security issues e.g. stolen vehicles parked on Trust property.

Information on the number of complaints received by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts is published annually by the Department, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospitalstats/patient_safety/complaints.htm

Hospitals: Patient Food

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the effectiveness of the Nursing Care Standards for Patient Food in Hospital campaign in tackling (i) malnourishment; (ii) improving patient satisfaction levels; and (iii) reducing food waste.

(AQW 25854/11-15)

Mr Poots: "Get your 10 a day! Nursing Care Standards for patient food in hospital"(2007) were developed collaboratively by DHSSPS and the RCN, Northern Ireland.

A Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network (GAIN) audit (May 2012) considered the nutritional experiences of patients within acute settings of each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts against the standards set out in "Get your 10 a day". The aim of this project was to evaluate the extent to which standards 1-7 had been implemented in all five Trusts and to support further implementation of these. The audit identified areas of good practice along with areas of work needed to achieve the best possible outcomes for patients in terms of their nutrition.

(i) **Effectiveness of the Nursing Care Standards for Patient Food in Hospital campaign in tackling malnourishment;**

Findings from the GAIN audit are as follows:

- The findings echo earlier research which identifies that key responsibilities of nurses for nutritional care include assessment (screening), monitoring and referral for specialist assessment where appropriate.
- Current practice related to the management of nutrition for people in hospital settings varies across Northern Ireland.
- Areas of improvement were found in relation to:
 - 1 nutritional assessment (approx 85% screened ;approx 83% rescreened who were medium risk and 75% who were high risk);)
 - 2 nutrition care plans
 - 3 accuracy of monitoring (i.e. recording of food intake or weight and height).
- Areas for improvement from the completed audit include the following recommendations:
 - 1 BMI measurement is to be measured as soon as possible by professionals;
 - 2 Nutritional rescreening on a weekly basis for those participants who are in hospital for more than 7 days
 - 3 A documented care plan for each patient that has an identified nutritional risk.
 - 4 For those at high risk they must have a referral made to the dietician

(ii) **Effectiveness of the Nursing Care Standards for Patient Food in Hospital campaign in tackling improving patient satisfaction levels;**

The GAIN audit found:

- evidence of the promotion of good nutritional care by managing mealtimes, and enhancing the mealtime environment.
- Despite initiatives to improve their experience of eating in hospital, patients' nutritional needs can be better met if the standards inherent within the DHSSPS "Get your 10 a day! Nursing Care Standards for patient food in hospital" are adhered to.

In relation to patient satisfaction, recommendations of the GAIN audit include:

- Patients where possible, providing input into their nutritional care plan; This input should be documented in their care plan;
- All trusts should have a method in place to identify if a patient requires assistance and this information should be up to date and accurate; Of those who require this assistance 100% received this
- where a protected mealtime policy exists this should be enforced, where none is in existence then consideration should be given as to implementing a policy;
- Whilst it is recognised that medical assessments are required throughout the day, where possible assessments should be carried out outside mealtimes unless totally necessary;
- Where possible, Ward rounds should not be carried out during mealtimes.
- All unnecessary activity, whether medical or non-medical, should cease during meal times.

Within Patient Client Experience quarterly monitoring (on agreed areas), there is a specific question in relation to patients gaining assistance with eating and drinking. Trusts will undertake local action depending on response to this question.

In 2011/12, Trusts reported examples of actions taken at a local level, including:

- Reinforcing the importance of the fundamentals of care;
- Providing additional training for some staff in feeding patients skills;
- Highlighting the importance of hydration and nutrition recovery.

In light of the 2012/13 monitoring information, a number of areas were identified as regional priorities for 2013/14 with actions to be progressed by the Patient Client Experience working group

(iii) **Effectiveness of the Nursing Care Standards for Patient Food in Hospital campaign in reducing food waste;**

Whilst not specifically audited within the GAIN audit this did find that of those who required assistance with eating, 100% received this. It is recognised that when those who need assistance receive this, that food plate waste is likely to be reduced if patients are supported to eat.

Hospitals: Food for Thought Recommendations

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the five recommendations made by the Patient and Client Council, in the March 2011 publication Food for Thought: Views of Patients and the Public on Hospital Meals, have been adopted as practice and policy in the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 25855/11-15)

Mr Poots: Food for Thought: Views of Patients and the Public on Hospital Meals (March 2011) has five recommendations all of which are in the process of being adopted across the Health and Social Care system .The Patient and Client Council recommendations and responses being actioned across Health and Social Care include:

Recommendation 1. The proposed “Promoting Good Nutrition – A Strategy for Good Nutritional Care for Adults in all Care Settings in Northern Ireland” should address the key messages within this report;

Action: A Promoting Good Nutrition Steering Group chaired through the Public Health Agency, is implementing an agreed action plan to realise the vision of the Promoting Good Nutrition strategy for all adults in Northern Ireland. Through this mechanism the key messages within Food for Thought: Views of Patients and the Public on Hospital Meals will be taken forward.

Recommendation 2. Patients and carers should be involved in a “Nutritional Coalition or stakeholder forum to improve feeding of people in care across Northern Ireland;

Action: A nutrition coalition was set up by the Patient and Client Council and formally launched by Minister Poots in April 2012. This is chaired by the Chief Executive of the PPC, Maeve Hully. The coalition will raise awareness, front campaigns and build public confidence so that people will know what to expect from health and social care services

Recommendation 3. There should be adequate staffing available at meal times to ensure that patients are given the assistance they need

Action: Regarding nursing staff, the CNO is leading work through the Public Health Agency and Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council to develop a suite of tools to be used by Trusts to ensure that appropriate staff are in place across all care settings. These will take some time to be completed and these will be rolled out within specific settings as they are completed. In addition, Trusts undertake Patient Client Experience monitoring (in agreed areas) on a quarterly basis, which includes a question on whether patients gained assistance with eating and drinking (if required). Trusts will undertake local improvements as required.

Recommendation 4. Policy and procedures should be developed to enable family members and carers to assist patients with feeding if requested by the patient;

Action: Alongside the use of volunteers, where family members wish to be involved Trusts are respectful of this and facilitate family and carer involvement at mealtimes where it is appropriate to do so.

Recommendation 5. A volunteer strategy and action plan should be developed to enable volunteers to assist patients at meal times.

Action: Trusts are exploring the use of volunteers at mealtimes at present. This is at various stages of implementation. The Chief Nursing Officer and her colleagues in the Northern Ireland Nurse Leaders Network recently helped launch and promote a joint charter between the Royal College of Nursing and Volunteer Now to promote volunteering within health and social care. Facilitating and supporting the use of volunteers to assist patients at hospital mealtimes in order to promote nutrition is a key component of this strategy.

Child Abuse

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent publicity surrounding possible cases of child abuse, whether steps are being taken to establish if third party individuals and organisations were aware of these particular cases prior to 2012, but did not make the appropriate authorities aware.

(AQW 25868/11-15)

Mr Poots: At this stage, I have no evidence to indicate any third party individual or organisation was aware of any of the cases currently subject of the ongoing police investigation into child sexual exploitation, which was not reported to the relevant authorities. There is an obligation on any individual who suspects or knows that a child is being or has been abused to bring it to the immediate attention of both the police and/or social services.

Older People: Domiciliary and Residential Care

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what independent advocacy services are available to help older people make decisions on domiciliary and residential care.

(AQW 25870/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department provides core funding to a range of voluntary sector organisations including Age NI and the Alzheimer's Society both of whom provide independent advocacy services to older people.

In addition, older people who may require domiciliary or residential care services will first of all have their needs assessed by a social worker and other professionals as appropriate. The individual themselves and, where appropriate, their family and/or carers will be fully engaged in that process. Following assessment, each individual's keyworker should ensure that the individual is supported to make informed choices about their care package.

More widely my Department published Developing Advocacy Services – A Guide for Commissioners in May 2012 and an associated Action Plan. The Guide aims to help commissioners better understand and develop advocacy services in Northern Ireland by introducing a number of principles and standards to underpin future commissioning and delivery. Independence is one of the key principles and is also reflected in the standards. Progress against the Action Plan is being monitored by my Department.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of his Department's, the Health and Social Care Board's and the Safeguarding Children Board's response to the recommendations of the Barnardo's Child Sexual Exploitation Report in October 2011.

(AQW 25871/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have attached a table which details the actions taken to date and ongoing work by my Department, the Health and Social Care Board, Health and Social Care Trusts and the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland relating to child sexual exploitation. All of the actions relate directly to the recommendations of the Barnardo's Child Exploitation Report "Not a World Away" the sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland".

Annex A

Barnardo's Report "Not a World Away" the sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland – Recommendations, action taken to date and ongoing work by DHSSPS, HSCB, HSCTs and SBNI

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
1	When established, the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland [SBNI] should, as part of its work plan, consider the issue of child sexual exploitation and the effectiveness of current responses to it.	<p>The SBNI was established on 17 September 2012 and within 3 weeks (on 04 October 2012) wrote to Directors of Children's Services within all five HSC Trusts to seek information on prevalence of CSE, how Trusts identify it and respond to it in risk management terms and to ask Trusts to identify any particular problems experienced in connection with CSE. This information was used to inform the action plan now being taken by the SBNI.</p> <p>The SBNI draft Strategic Plan was issued for consultation in April 2013 with an end date in July 2013. This draft plan indicated that the SBNI would work with member agencies to develop a coordinated strategy and working model to protect and safeguard children who go missing from home and care and/or at risk of sexual exploitation.</p> <p>A range of actions is now planned by the SBNI. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Establishment of a sexual exploitation Strategic Partnership Group; ■ The identification of the scale and nature of the problem in NI; ■ The development of an awareness raising campaign for children, families and professionals (the launch of the leaflets is the start of the campaign); ■ A review of the risk assessment tools currently being used; ■ The development of an information sharing agreement for CSE; ■ A review existing procedures / guidance to establish any gaps; ■ Working with the Knowledge Transfer Hub to identify education requirements for children, parents and professionals ■ Working with the Knowledge Transfer Hub to scope and research good models of practice and how this can be translated to Northern Ireland; ■ Evaluating and/or piloting a co-located multi-disciplinary/multi-agency team focusing on children who go missing. 	Ongoing

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2	DHSSPS should revise existing Safeguarding and Child Protection Guidance to explicitly reference the complex nature and impact of sexual exploitation. This should be supported by the development of detailed inter-agency procedural guidance for practitioners to assist them to respond appropriately to instances where the sexual exploitation of children or young people is confirmed or suspected. The latter will be a matter for the SBNI to consider when established.	<p>There are a number of child protection guidance documents which the department is in the process of developing. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A revision of extant Departmental guidance <i>Co-operating to Safeguard Children, first produced</i> in 2003. The revision is a Programme for Government commitment. This is due to be published by March 2015, after a period of public consultation. While this is a DHSSPS-led exercise, child safeguarding is a cross-government activity as effective safeguarding requires interdepartmental, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support. ■ This guidance will be supplemented by operational child protection policies and procedures, which will also deal with child sexual exploitation. This is a statutory responsibility of the SBNI. ■ Departmental guidance on safeguarding children and young people who are sexually active is currently being developed by a multi-agency working group. The guidance will be issued for consultation by March 2014. <p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In April 2012, the HSCB published Regional <i>Residential Child Care Policies</i> issued By Health & Social Care Board, which includes chapters on safeguarding, with a specific section on Child Sexual Exploitation, a section on misuse of substances which also assists in that it specifically addresses the relevant issues of Alcohol and Drugs counselling, and there is also a guidance chapter on Physical Restraint. ■ In May 2012, the guidance document <i>Police Involvement in Residential Care Safeguarding of Children Missing from Home and Foster Care</i> was further revised by the HSCB, directly as a result of the Barnardo's report. 	Ongoing

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3	<p>The HSC Board should progress the development of a targeted and fully resourced action plan on sexual exploitation that includes, but is not limited to, consideration of the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ data collection and monitoring ■ professional competency and capacity ■ best-practice models for responding to sexual exploitation, including the merits of a co-located inter-agency model of response ■ regional implementation of the sexual exploitation risk assessment tool ■ resourcing of a regional specialist support service. 	<p>A number of fully resourced actions were taken by the HSC Board and HSC Trusts which respond to the elements of the action plan identified in this recommendation in the Barnardo's report.</p> <p>1 Data collection and monitoring</p> <p>The Barnardo's report identifies a strong (although not absolute) link between children going missing and the risk of child sexual exploitation. In recognition of that fact, the Board collects data on missing children through the Delegated Statutory Functions reporting mechanism. The system of data collection was revised in April 2011 and again in April 2013. Information is now collected on the numbers of children who go missing and the number of times a child goes missing. Initially information related to periods of absence of more than 24 hours. Information is now recorded on contact between children's homes and the police relating to children who go missing for less than 24 hours, including absences of a relatively short duration.</p> <p>The Board has also introduced a Regional Untoward Events reporting mechanism which includes the provision of a report for each event where a young person is missing for more than 24 hours. These reports are collected centrally to allow for professional oversight and follow up on individual incidents and for data collation and analysis.</p> <p>Within Trusts, a range of data collection and monitoring systems have been established. By way of example, in the South Eastern Trust, a Safety, Quality and Experience project regarding missing children has been ongoing since October 2012. In the Western Trust, a Senior Management Risk Monitoring meeting takes place on a monthly basis to consider trends and patterns that come from the Team Health Checks; as a result of those meetings, corrective action is taken if necessary.</p> <p>Finally, data collection relating to identification of the scale and nature of the problem of child sexual exploitation will be taken forward under the auspices of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.</p>	Ongoing

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		<p>2 Professional competency and capacity</p> <p>The HSCB and Trusts plan, commission and provide a wide range of training initiatives for staff working Children's Services based on identified priorities and service needs on an annual basis. The following are examples of the broad range of training which has particular relevance to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the professional competence issues raised in the Barnardo's report. This is not an exhaustive list.</p> <p>Competence</p> <p>Child Sexual Exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Specific training by Safe Choices, commissioned by the HSCB, has been provided across all Trust on signs, symptoms and preventative strategies in respect of CSE. Such training has been commissioned since 2008. In 2012/13 356 staff and carers received this training. Safe Choices also provide detailed consultations on specific cases. Since 200?, over 4000 people in the statutory and voluntary sectors have received training on CSE by Safe Choices. ■ Individual Trusts have commissioned additional training in CSE including 'Keeping Safe Training' and 'CSE and Missing from Home'. <p>Child Protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A wide range of child protection training is provided within Trusts. This includes recognition of signs and symptoms of all forms of abuse, responses to abuse and neglect and specialist training in joint protocol investigations with the PSNI. <p>Missing From Home and Foster Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training on implementation of HSC/PSNI regional guidance on Safeguarding Children Missing from Home and Foster Care. The link between children's increased vulnerability to CSE when missing is covered by the guidance. 	

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		<p>Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential care staff are trained in TCI to develop professional competence in engaging with young people, managing the environment and de-escalation of crises as well as use of physical restraint (holds). All children in care will have an Individual Crisis Management Plan which indicates if the use of TCI physical restraint should not be used (eg. Medical conditions, re-traumatising the young person). TCI should not be used as a preventative measure, for example, to stop a child leaving a children's home without permission. However, if an angry outburst were to occur as a result of such a refusal, then TCI may be a legitimate response. Staff will use their professional judgement in response to each individual and the circumstances. <p>Risk assessment, management and care planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Trusts provide training for staff on assessing and managing risk and professional judgement/decision-making. <p>Therapeutic approaches to working with children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential care staff have been trained in specific therapeutic approaches in working with children in care to develop professional competence in working with children who have experienced trauma and disadvantage and to develop understanding, skills and techniques in working with young people who present with challenging behaviour. This training was evaluated by the Social Care Institute for Excellence and QUB and findings indicated a positive impact on practice including more sensitive/appropriate use of language and improvements in managing challenging situations. A range of other training in specific therapeutic approaches and techniques including Motivational Interviewing, Model of Attachment Practice and Restorative Practice have also been provided to improve professional competence in working directly with young people. 	

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		<p>CSE Related Risk Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of training on factors which can increase young people's vulnerability and risk generally but to CSE in particular is also provided by all Trusts – Substance Misuse; Internet/Social Media; Mental Health; Resilience. <p>Human Trafficking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There have been a number of regional and local training initiatives to raise staff awareness about human trafficking. <p>Postgraduate Qualifications in Child Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each year, Trusts also fund a number of staff to undertake specific accredited post-graduate training leading to post graduate Certificates, Diplomas and Masters in Child Care Practice. <p>Capacity</p> <p>Working in Children's Services, in particular in child protection and residential child care, is challenging and a number of actions have been taken to strengthen supports for all staff and improve retention of experienced staff in these areas. Such initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All newly qualified social workers (NQSW) must undertake an assessed year in practice to consolidate their professional competence. There are specific requirements including induction, training, supervision, managed workloads. Similar models for support of NQSW are now being rolled out elsewhere in the UK. Appointment of senior social work practitioners to undertake more complex work and to provide mentorship/consultation to less experienced staff. There are 222 senior practitioners in Children's Services; 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment of 15 Principal Social Work Practitioners since 2009 in each Trust to ensure availability of expertise in specific practice areas, including with looked-after children. NI is the first country in the UK to introduce a Principal Practitioner social work grade. Referrals to social services have been increasing over the past number of years. Workforce data indicates a 5.8% increase in numbers of social workers employed by Trusts over the past 3 years. The Department launched a Social Work Strategy in 2012 which identifies workforce capacity and employer supports as key issues for frontline social workers and team leaders. Work has commenced to review the use and deployment of senior and principal practitioners to inform future workforce planning. Similar to the findings from the Munro Review of Child Protection Services in England, the compliance culture and focus on procedures and targets at the expense of child-centred service provision have been identified in the Social Work Strategy as issues in NI. There is a similar commitment in NI for the Department and associated agencies to review reporting and regulatory requirements, reduce bureaucracy and re-establish the child at the centre of the social work process and relationships at the heart of practice. Work has begun on a number of small scale initiatives to reduce bureaucracy which will increase staff capacity to engage in direct work with children, young people and families. Professional supervision is an important element of support for social workers in carrying out their work. Compliance in the provision of supervision with a regional policy and standards is monitored by each Trust. There are Departmental targets for training supervisors and funding to support such training across all Trusts. 	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A regional caseload management model was developed and endorsed by the Department and was issued in February 2012. This model is designed to assist social workers and their managers in Children's Services in the HSC Trusts to allocate and prioritise cases and associated tasks within manageable workloads. ■ The North/South Child Protection Hub is available to social workers in all Trusts – this provides a single portal to access information, up-to-date research and developments in child protection practice to support evidence-based practice and professional decision-making. ■ There has been an increase in the funding of Barnardo's Safe Choices reflecting the rise in young people identified at risk of CSE by Trust staff. ■ Looked-after Children (LAC) Therapeutic Services provide services in each Trust delivered by a range of professionals including psychologists and SPs. Their role is provide specialist wrap-a-round therapeutic services for individual young people in the care system as well as expert advice to staff. ■ A review of residential child care provision has been undertaken by the HSCB and Trusts and among its recommendations is one for smaller residential homes to accommodate no more than 4 young people. This will increase the staff/child ratio. ■ Development of Family Support Hubs and increased investment in early intervention is intended to provide non-stigmatising help to families at an earlier stage and is part of an overall strategy to improve outcomes for all children by preventing the development and/or escalation of difficulties at an earlier stage in children's lives. ■ The Children and Young Person's Strategic Partnership (established in 2011) brings together a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies and aims to maximise the investment in services to children's and their families through more effective joined up working and collaboration. This contributes to increasing capacity in the system for early intervention and services for children in need. 	

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		<p>3 Best-practice models for responding to sexual exploitation, including the merits of a co-located inter-agency model of response</p> <p>There are now a number of best practice models in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Co-location of police officers and social workers is one practice model for responding to cases of child abuse, including child sexual exploitation. The model has been used in the past and indeed in the present – the ongoing police investigation into child sexual exploitation is using a co-location model of practice. Social workers and police officers do not necessarily have to be co-located to work effectively together. We have a joint protocol in place which sets out how the police and social services work will together to investigate cases of child abuse and we have guidance in place which governs how the police and social services will respond to children who go missing from home and foster care. ■ There are also a number of excellent Trust-specific models of practice which are reflective of the quality of the relationship between police and social services at a locality level. For example, in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area, each residential unit has a dedicated community police officer who regularly visits the unit and completes (in conjunction with residential staff) education programmes for children and young people, for example, keeping safe, drugs awareness and respect/citizenship programmes. Also, 'a Children Missing from Care' Special Interest Group has been established on which the South Eastern HSC Trust, the Belfast HSC Trust, PSNI, the Safe Choices Project and VOYPIC are represented. The Group meets on a bi-monthly basis and shares trends analysis, good practice and initiatives relating to child sexual exploitation. 	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the Northern Trust, residential units hold quarterly meetings with PSNI to discuss the high-risk young people and the management of their cases. This is an acknowledgement of the importance of working relationships to try and protect as best we can these vulnerable young people. Also in the Northern Trust, an intensive support outreach team provides support to young people on the edge of care. This year, two of the team worked specifically on child sexual exploitation, producing leaflets and drama production (Break the cycle) which was ran in the Waterfront Hall. <p>4 Regional implementation of the sexual exploitation risk assessment tool</p> <p>A child sexual exploitation assessment tool, the same tool which was used in the course of the 'Not a World Away' research, has been implemented across all five HSC Trust areas.</p> <p>5 Resourcing of a regional specialist support service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Between 2008 and 2011, the Department provided funding of around £222k to Missing Children's Project of the Barnardo's-run Safe Choices Service. [This is in addition to circa £142k provided to Barnardo's to undertake the 'Not a World Away' research.] The aim of the Missing Children Project is to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people in care by reducing the number of missing episodes of children; to increase the skills and knowledge of staff in children's homes and foster carers in relation to the issue of sexual exploitation; and to develop and disseminate a risk assessment model to children's homes on the issue of young people missing from care. ■ Funding for the Safe Choices Service was picked up by the Health and Social Care Board from April 2011. The Board has committed additional resources to the project to enable it to meet additional demand, including that generated by the ongoing PSNI investigation into child sexual exploitation. The contract with the Project includes the direct provision of services to children who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation. 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In addition, the Department invests in a Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, a Regional Secure Care Service and an Intensive Support Service, which operates across the region. A range of self-harm services funded under the Protect Life Strategy are regionally available. They include Lifeline (a 24/7 regional crisis response helpline established in January 2008); Card Before You Leave bereavement support and self-harm counselling and support. This is in addition to a range of specialist supports to address alcohol and substance misuse, self-esteem issues and transitions out of care and into adulthood. ■ In the Regional Secure Care Centre a therapeutic support service with a dedicated clinical psychologist and systemic social work practitioner is in place. The HSCB had provided additional funding for the development of a therapeutic support service for all looked-after children, in addition to that provided in children and young people in secure care. 	

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4	<p>The HSC Board should consider how best to co-ordinate and prioritise the provision of specialist drug and alcohol counselling services to young people who display signs of drug and alcohol abuse, which may make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation, in particular to children living in residential care;</p>	<p>Drug and alcohol misuse adds to the vulnerability of looked-after children and further heightens their exposure to risk of sexual exploitation. There has been investment in a range of services aimed at tackling the drug and alcohol problems. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Around £1m has been invested by the HSC in One Stop Shop services providing information, support and signposting on drugs and alcohol, mental and sexual health, relationship issues, resilience, coping with school/employment. The One Stop Shop model of drop-in services was set up by PHA to provide young people with accurate, up-to-date and objective information about personal and lifestyle issues, choices, where to find help and advice, and how to access it. The model was developed by the PHA following the establishment of four pilot projects in different areas across Northern Ireland (North Down and Ards, Enniskillen, Banbridge and East Antrim) to test a range of potential models. The pilots were positively evaluated, and the PHA subsequently tendered for a range of new one-stop-shops across Northern Ireland, primarily focused on areas that have a need and / or a lack of services. A network has also been put in place to spread learning between the services. ■ £2.5m has been invested in Services for Young People, Children and their Families. This includes youth treatment, specialist drug and alcohol posts with Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, targeted education programmes for at risk young people and services for families. ■ Work is underway, led by the HSCB, to extend existing service provision to ensure ease of access to drug and alcohol services, including counselling services, by children in care (including children in residential care) who are in need of those services. 	Ongoing
5	<p>The Public Health Agency should develop a campaign to raise public awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and young people.</p>	<p>Barnardo's will engage in discussions with the PHA in the near future, however, In advance of those discussions, the PHA has been involved in a number of initiatives relating to improving children's sexual health. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The development of a Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan covering the period 2008-2013. The aim of the Strategy/Plan is to improve, protect and promote the sexual health and well-being of the population of Northern Ireland. The Strategy recognises that some groups are particularly vulnerable and require particular action. They include young people under 25 years and children and young people who are looked after or leaving care. ■ The establishment of a Regional Sexual Health Improvement Network in 2010. The Network has reviewed the evidence base related to reducing teenage pregnancy and the rates of STIs and HIV. ■ PHA is a key funder of the HSC Knowledge Transfer Scheme, Improving the Impact of Research, which is based on the findings of the Barnardo's Research on Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland. The proposed impact of the project is: increased awareness and understanding of CSE amongst HSC professionals; increased consistency in identification and risk assessment; increased access to practice-based CSE resources; greater awareness of risk amongst young people; increased user services engagement; and greater inter-disciplinary working. ■ With the establishment of the SBNI, on which the PHA is represented, leaflets to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation among parents, professionals and young people have been produced. Also, an NSPCC helpline is in place which will provide advice and support to parents, carers, and children and young people who have concerns relating to child sexual exploitation. 	Ongoing

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness-raising of child sexual exploitation is a core activity of the Barnardo's Safe Choices Project, which continues to be funded by the Health and Social Care Board. Prior to funding by the HSCB, the Safe Choices Project was funded directly by the Department. The PHA also provided £5k to Barnardo's in 2012/2013 to fund a Sexual Health Group Work project. 	
6	The NI Policing Board should incorporate child protection (including sexual exploitation) as a priority in forthcoming Policing Plans, in reflection of the critical importance of this area of work.	This is a matter for the Policing Board.	

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why a multi-agency action plan on child exploitation is only now being progressed, given that it was a recommendation in the Barnardo's Child Sexual Exploitation Report in October 2011.

(AQW 25886/11-15)

Mr Poots: The multi-agency action plan on child sexual exploitation now being progressed is a reference to the plan developed by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), which has identified child sexual exploitation as a strategic priority of the Board, which was established in September 2012.

I have attached a table which sets out actions directly relating to the Barnardo's report, Not a World Away – the sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland. For completeness, the list includes the actions currently being taken by the SBNI, in addition to actions taken by my Department, the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Trusts, subsequent to the publication of the Barnardo's report in 2011. The table also makes reference to some actions taken in connection with child sexual exploitation prior to the publication of the report.

Annex A**Barnardo's Report "Not a World Away" the sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland – Recommendations, action taken to date and ongoing work by DHSSPS, HSCB, HSCTs and SBNI**

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		<p>Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential care staff are trained in TCI to develop professional competence in engaging with young people, managing the environment and de-escalation of crises as well as use of physical restraint (holds). All children in care will have an Individual Crisis Management Plan which indicates if the use of TCI physical restraint should not be used (eg. Medical conditions, re-traumatising the young person). TCI should not be used as a preventative measure, for example, to stop a child leaving a children's home without permission. However, if an angry outburst were to occur as a result of such a refusal, then TCI may be a legitimate response. Staff will use their professional judgement in response to each individual and the circumstances. <p>Risk assessment, management and care planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Trusts provide training for staff on assessing and managing risk and professional judgement/decision-making. <p>Therapeutic approaches to working with children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential care staff have been trained in specific therapeutic approaches in working with children in care to develop professional competence in working with children who have experienced trauma and disadvantage and to develop understanding, skills and techniques in working with young people who present with challenging behaviour. This training was evaluated by the Social Care Institute for Excellence and QUB and findings indicated a positive impact on practice including more sensitive/appropriate use of language and improvements in managing challenging situations. A range of other training in specific therapeutic approaches and techniques including Motivational Interviewing, Model of Attachment Practice and Restorative Practice have also been provided to improve professional competence in working directly with young people. 	

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
		<p>CSE Related Risk Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A range of training on factors which can increase young people's vulnerability and risk generally but to CSE in particular is also provided by all Trusts – Substance Misuse; Internet/ Social Media; Mental Health; Resilience. <p>Human Trafficking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There have been a number of regional and local training initiatives to raise staff awareness about human trafficking. <p>Postgraduate Qualifications in Child Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Each year, Trusts also fund a number of staff to undertake specific accredited post-graduate training leading to post graduate Certificates, Diplomas and Masters in Child Care Practice. <p>Capacity</p> <p>Working in Children's Services, in particular in child protection and residential child care, is challenging and a number of actions have been taken to strengthen supports for all staff and improve retention of experienced staff in these areas. Such initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All newly qualified social workers (NQSW) must undertake an assessed year in practice to consolidate their professional competence. There are specific requirements including induction, training, supervision, managed workloads. Similar models for support of NQSW are now being rolled out elsewhere in the UK. ■ Appointment of senior social work practitioners to undertake more complex work and to provide mentorship/consultation to less experienced staff. There are 222 senior practitioners in Children's Services; 	

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Appointment of 15 Principal Social Work Practitioners since 2009 in each Trust to ensure availability of expertise in specific practice areas, including with looked-after children. NI is the first country in the UK to introduce a Principal Practitioner social work grade. ■ Referrals to social services have been increasing over the past number of years. Workforce data indicates a 5.8% increase in numbers of social workers employed by Trusts over the past 3 years. ■ The Department launched a Social Work Strategy in 2012 which identifies workforce capacity and employer supports as key issues for frontline social workers and team leaders. Work has commenced to review the use and deployment of senior and principal practitioners to inform future workforce planning. ■ Similar to the findings from the Munro Review of Child Protection Services in England, the compliance culture and focus on procedures and targets at the expense of child-centred service provision have been identified in the Social Work Strategy as issues in NI. There is a similar commitment in NI for the Department and associated agencies to review reporting and regulatory requirements, reduce bureaucracy and re-establish the child at the centre of the social work process and relationships at the heart of practice. Work has begun on a number of small scale initiatives to reduce bureaucracy which will increase staff capacity to engage in direct work with children, young people and families. ■ Professional supervision is an important element of support for social workers in carrying out their work. Compliance in the provision of supervision with a regional policy and standards is monitored by each Trust. There are Departmental targets for training supervisors and funding to support such training across all Trusts. 	

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A regional caseload management model was developed and endorsed by the Department and was issued in February 2012. This model is designed to assist social workers and their managers in Children's Services in the HSC Trusts to allocate and prioritise cases and associated tasks within manageable workloads. ■ The North/South Child Protection Hub is available to social workers in all Trusts – this provides a single portal to access information, up-to-date research and developments in child protection practice to support evidence-based practice and professional decision-making. ■ There has been an increase in the funding of Barnardo's Safe Choices reflecting the rise in young people identified at risk of CSE by Trust staff. ■ Looked after Children (LAC) Therapeutic Services provide services in each Trust delivered by a range of professionals including psychologists and SPs. Their role is provide specialist wrap-a-round therapeutic services for individual young people in the care system as well as expert advice to staff. ■ A review of residential child care provision has been undertaken by the HSCB and Trusts and among its recommendations is one for smaller residential homes to accommodate no more than 4 young people. This will increase the staff/child ratio. ■ Development of Family Support Hubs and increased investment in early intervention is intended to provide non-stigmatising help to families at an earlier stage and is part of an overall strategy to improve outcomes for all children by preventing the development and/or escalation of difficulties at an earlier stage in children's lives. ■ The Children and Young Person's Strategic Partnership (established in 2011) brings together a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies and aims to maximise the investment in services to children's and their families through more effective joined up working and collaboration. This contributes to increasing capacity in the system for early intervention and services for children in need. 	

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
		<p>3 Best-practice models for responding to sexual exploitation, including the merits of a co-located inter-agency model of response</p> <p>There are now a number of best practice models in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Co-location of police officers and social workers is one practice model for responding to cases of child abuse, including child sexual exploitation. The model has been used in the past and indeed in the present – the ongoing police investigation into child sexual exploitation is using a co-location model of practice. Social workers and police officers do not necessarily have to be co-located to work effectively together. We have a joint protocol in place which sets out how the police and social services work will together to investigate cases of child abuse and we have guidance in place which governs how the police and social services will respond to children who go missing from home and foster care. ■ There are also a number of excellent Trust-specific models of practice which are reflective of the quality of the relationship between police and social services at a locality level. For example, in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area, each residential unit has a dedicated community police officer who regularly visits the unit and completes (in conjunction with residential staff) education programmes for children and young people, for example, keeping safe, drugs awareness and respect/citizenship programmes. Also, 'a Children Missing from Care' Special Interest Group has been established on which the South Eastern HSC Trust, the Belfast HSC Trust, PSNI, the Safe Choices Project and VOYPIC are represented. The Group meets on a bi-monthly basis and shares trends analysis, good practice and initiatives relating to child sexual exploitation. 	

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the Northern Trust, residential units hold quarterly meetings with PSNI to discuss the high-risk young people and the management of their cases. This is an acknowledgement of the importance of working relationships to try and protect as best we can these vulnerable young people. Also in the Northern Trust, an intensive support outreach team provides support to young people on the edge of care. This year, two of the team worked specifically on child sexual exploitation, producing leaflets and drama production (Break the cycle) which was ran in the Waterfront Hall. <p>4 Regional implementation of the sexual exploitation risk assessment tool</p> <p>A child sexual exploitation assessment tool, the same tool which was used in the course of the 'Not a World Away' research, has been implemented across all five HSC Trust areas.</p> <p>5 Resourcing of a regional specialist support service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Between 2008 and 2011, the Department provided funding of around £222k to Missing Children's Project of the Barnardo's-run Safe Choices Service. [This is in addition to circa £142k provided to Barnardo's to undertake the 'Not a World Away' research.] The aim of the Missing Children Project is to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people in care by reducing the number of missing episodes of children; to increase the skills and knowledge of staff in children's homes and foster carers in relation to the issue of sexual exploitation; and to develop and disseminate a risk assessment model to children's homes on the issue of young people missing from care. ■ Funding for the Safe Choices Service was picked up by the Health and Social Care Board from April 2011. The Board has committed additional resources to the project to enable it to meet additional demand, including that generated by the ongoing PSNI investigation into child sexual exploitation. The contract with the Project includes the direct provision of services to children who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation. 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In addition, the Department invests in a Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, a Regional Secure Care Service and an Intensive Support Service, which operates across the region. A range of self-harm services funded under the Protect Life Strategy are regionally available. They include Lifeline (a 24/7 regional crisis response helpline established in January 2008); Card Before You Leave bereavement support and self-harm counselling and support. This is in addition to a range of specialist supports to address alcohol and substance misuse, self-esteem issues and transitions out of care and into adulthood. ■ In the Regional Secure Care Centre a therapeutic support service with a dedicated clinical psychologist and systemic social work practitioner is in place. The HSCB had provided additional funding for the development of a therapeutic support service for all looked-after children, in addition to that provided in children and young people in secure care. 	

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
4	<p>The HSC Board should consider how best to co-ordinate and prioritise the provision of specialist drug and alcohol counselling services to young people who display signs of drug and alcohol abuse, which may make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation, in particular to children living in residential care;</p>	<p>Drug and alcohol misuse adds to the vulnerability of looked-after children and further heightens their exposure to risk of sexual exploitation. There has been investment in a range of services aimed at tackling the drug and alcohol problems. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Around £1m has been invested by the HSC in One Stop Shop services providing information, support and signposting on drugs and alcohol, mental and sexual health, relationship issues, resilience, coping with school/employment. The One Stop Shop model of drop-in services was set up by PHA to provide young people with accurate, up-to-date and objective information about personal and lifestyle issues, choices, where to find help and advice, and how to access it. The model was developed by the PHA following the establishment of four pilot projects in different areas across Northern Ireland (North Down and Ards, Enniskillen, Banbridge and East Antrim) to test a range of potential models. The pilots were positively evaluated, and the PHA subsequently tendered for a range of new one-stop-shops across Northern Ireland, primarily focused on areas that have a need and / or a lack of services. A network has also been put in place to spread learning between the services. ■ £2.5m has been invested in Services for Young People, Children and their Families. This includes youth treatment, specialist drug and alcohol posts with Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, targeted education programmes for at risk young people and services for families. ■ Work is underway, led by the HSCB, to extend existing service provision to ensure ease of access to drug and alcohol services, including counselling services, by children in care (including children in residential care) who are in need of those services. 	Ongoing

Rec.	Recommendation	Action taken	Current Status
5	The Public Health Agency should develop a campaign to raise public awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and young people.	<p>Barnardo's will engage in discussions with the PHA in the near future, however, In advance of those discussions, the PHA has been involved in a number of initiatives relating to improving children's sexual health. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The development of a Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan covering the period 2008-2013. The aim of the Strategy/Plan is to improve, protect and promote the sexual health and well-being of the population of Northern Ireland. The Strategy recognises that some groups are particularly vulnerable and require particular action. They include young people under 25 years and children and young people who are looked after or leaving care. ■ The establishment of a Regional Sexual Health Improvement Network in 2010. The Network has reviewed the evidence base related to reducing teenage pregnancy and the rates of STIs and HIV. ■ PHA is a key funder of the HSC Knowledge Transfer Scheme, Improving the Impact of Research, which is based on the findings of the Barnardo's Research on Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland. The proposed impact of the project is: increased awareness and understanding of CSE amongst HSC professionals; increased consistency in identification and risk assessment; increased access to practice-based CSE resources; greater awareness of risk amongst young people; increased user services engagement; and greater inter-disciplinary working. ■ With the establishment of the SBNI, on which the PHA is represented, leaflets to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation among parents, professionals and young people have been produced. Also, an NSPCC helpline is in place which will provide advice and support to parents, carers, and children and young people who have concerns relating to child sexual exploitation. 	Ongoing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Awareness-raising of child sexual exploitation is a core activity of the Barnardo's Safe Choices Project, which continues to be funded by the Health and Social Care Board. Prior to funding by the HSCB, the Safe Choices Project was funded directly by the Department. The PHA also provided £5k to Barnardo's in 2012/2013 to fund a Sexual Health Group Work project. 	
6	The NI Policing Board should incorporate child protection (including sexual exploitation) as a priority in forthcoming Policing Plans, in reflection of the critical importance of this area of work.	This is a matter for the Policing Board.	

Adoption

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the number of (i) single gay or lesbian people; and (ii) unmarried heterosexual couples that have adopted a child over the last three years; and whether the current adoption procedures here allow Health and Social Care Trusts to approve gay, lesbian and unmarried people to adopt.

(AQW 25887/11-15)

Mr Poots: Single adopters are not required to declare their sexual orientation to the HSC Trust, so an accurate reflection of the position, in relation to single gay or lesbian people is not possible.

There have been no adoption orders granted in Northern Ireland to unmarried heterosexual couples over the last three years.

Following the High Court ruling on 27 June, an Information Note was issued to Health and Social Care Trusts and Adoption Agencies on 8 July setting out the legal consequences of the High Court judgment and advising that any applications to adopt received from unmarried couples (irrespective of sexual orientation) should be processed through to a decision about suitability to adopt. The final decision about whether an adoption order should be made will be a matter for the court.

Tinnitus

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to introduce a strategy for tinnitus sufferers which will set out treatment pathways across the statutory, private and voluntary sectors.

(AQW 25895/11-15)

Mr Poots: Currently, a diagnosis of tinnitus is generally provided by a GP who then initiates the appropriate patient pathway. This may for example include a referral to ENT, audiology services, or even perhaps to the Regional Supra-Specialist Hearing Therapy Clinic where a combination of treatments are available.

However, I am aware that Action on Hearing Loss recently launched their own "Tinnitus Strategy" for Northern Ireland which proposes a new pathway and officials are currently considering the merits of that document.

Tinnitus

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the fact that tinnitus sufferers, who have received private ENT treatment, cannot be referred back to the Health Service for treatment.

(AQW 25896/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not the case that tinnitus sufferers who have received private ENT treatment cannot be referred back to the health service for treatment. I am advised by Health and Social Care Trusts that they receive referrals for tinnitus treatment from GPs and other consultants and these are all managed in the same fashion. If treatment for tinnitus is required then the patient will be assessed and treated within the health service as per the Integrated Elective Access Protocol guidelines.

Skeagh House

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 25206/11-15, and given the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's decision to cease permanent admissions to statutory residential homes and the stated position that there are no plans to recommence permanent admissions, how many residents will be admitted upon the reopening of Skeagh House.

(AQW 25912/11-15)

Mr Poots: Skeagh House was evacuated on 27 March 2013 as a result of a landslip and associated risk. The site is subject to an ongoing engineering assessment; consequently, it is not possible to be definitive regarding timescales for reopening at this stage.

In the event of a decision being made to reopen Skeagh House, the Southern HSC Trust has advised me that the number of permanent residents from Skeagh House who currently reside in Crozier House is eight.

Life Expectancy: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the life expectancy of people in North Down, broken down by ward.

(AQW 25919/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average Life Expectancy at birth for North Down District Council (2008-2010) is 79.0 years for males and 82.2 years for females. Due to the small numbers involved, life expectancy estimates are not available for individual electoral wards.

Autism: Belfast

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust currently does not have the capacity to meet the demand for autism services, such as multi-disciplinary autism assessments.

(AQW 25921/11-15)

Mr Poots: The accepted referral rate for autism multi-disciplinary assessments in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) has increased over the last 2 years from approximately 350 to 560 children and young people per year. The HSC Board, in partnership with the BHSCT, completed a demand capacity review in August 2013. As a result of this review, the HSCB has estimated that the Trust will need a minimum of three new staff to address this increase in demand.

Whilst at present no recurrent source of funding has been identified to address this gap in service provision, the Health and Social Care Board is currently seeking to identify non-recurrent funding to assist the Trust in addressing some of the pressures associated with the current increase in referrals. The Health and Social Care Board has also logged this gap in service as a cost pressure for 2014/15 funding.

Autism: Belfast

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to improve waiting times for autism services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 25923/11-15)

Mr Poots: The accepted referral rate for autism multi-disciplinary assessments in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) has increased over the last 2 years from approximately 350 to 560 children and young people per year. The HSC Board, in partnership with the BHSCT, completed a demand capacity review in August 2013. As a result of this review, the HSCB has estimated that the Trust will need a minimum of three new staff to address this increase in demand.

Whilst at present no recurrent source of funding has been identified to address this gap in service provision, the Health and Social Care Board is currently seeking to identify non-recurrent funding to assist the Trust in addressing some of the pressures associated with the current increase in referrals. The Health and Social Care Board has also logged this gap in service as a cost pressure for 2014/15 funding.

Autism: Belfast

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to maximise the number of multi-disciplinary autism assessments that can be provided in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 25924/11-15)

Mr Poots: The accepted referral rate for autism multi-disciplinary assessments in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) has increased over the last 2 years from approximately 350 to 560 children and young people per year. The HSC Board, in partnership with the BHSCT, completed a demand capacity review in August 2013. As a result of this review, the HSCB has estimated that the Trust will need a minimum of three new staff to address this increase in demand.

Whilst at present no recurrent source of funding has been identified to address this gap in service provision, the Health and Social Care Board is currently seeking to identify non-recurrent funding to assist the Trust in addressing some of the pressures associated with the current increase in referrals. The Health and Social Care Board has also logged this gap in service as a cost pressure for 2014/15 funding.

Autism: Belfast

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to provide additional resources and alternative methods of delivering assessments, such as multi-disciplinary autism assessments, in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 25925/11-15)

Mr Poots: The accepted referral rate for autism multi-disciplinary assessments in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) has increased over the last 2 years from approximately 350 to 560 children and young people per year. The HSC Board, in partnership with the BHSCT, completed a demand capacity review in August 2013. As a result of this review, the HSCB has estimated that the Trust will need a minimum of three new staff to address this increase in demand.

Whilst at present no recurrent source of funding has been identified to address this gap in service provision, the Health and Social Care Board is currently seeking to identify non-recurrent funding to assist the Trust in addressing some of the pressures associated with the current increase in referrals. The Health and Social Care Board has also logged this gap in service as a cost pressure for 2014/15 funding.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why local patients with Inflammatory Bowel Disease have only one third of the specialist nurses recommended to provide their care compared to the rest of the UK; and when his Department will address this situation.

(AQW 25938/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Trusts in Northern Ireland have a specialist Nurse in place to deal with Inflammatory Bowel Disease and are in dialogue with HSCB for additional funding.

The position in each Trust is as follows:

- The Southern Trust had secured funding for 0.5 whole time equivalent of an Inflammatory Bowel Disease nurse and further funding has just been confirmed which will increase the post holder's hours to 0.9 whole time equivalent.
- The Western Trust currently employs 0.5 whole time equivalent Inflammatory Bowel Disease Nurse.
- South Eastern Trust has received funding for a 0.5 whole time equivalent specialist nurse which has limited the service the Trust can provide. The Trust is in dialogue with HSCB to provide funding for a 1.0 whole time equivalent specialist nurse.
- Belfast Trust has one whole time equivalent Inflammatory Bowel Disease nurse.
- The Northern Trust employs 0.62 whole time equivalent specialist nurses for Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

In addition, many more nurses would have received training as part of a wider course, such as Stoma Therapy or, less commonly, would have undertaken a specialist IBD course. Information on the total number of nurses who have received some degree of training in IBD is not available centrally and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Colitis: Anti-TNF Therapies

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why outpatients with chronic Ulcerative Colitis are not considered appropriate candidates for maintenance anti-TNF biologic therapies compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the UK.

(AQW 25939/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board commissions biologic therapies for patients with ulcerative colitis in line with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance. This link with NICE ensures that Northern Ireland has up-to-date, independent professional, evidence-based best practice guidance on the value of health care interventions. Current NICE guidance does not recommend maintenance treatment of this condition with biologics. Specifically for treatment of this condition the HSC Board complies with: NICE Technical Appraisal (TA) 163 available at <http://publications.nice.org.uk/infliximab-for-acute-exacerbations-of-ulcerative-colitis-ta163>; and, NICE Technical Appraisal (TA) 140, available at <http://publications.nice.org.uk/infliximab-for-subacute-manifestations-of-ulcerative-colitis-ta140>

Residential Care Homes: Places

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) private residential care homes and places available; (ii) statutory residential care homes and places available, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 25947/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of statutory and independent residential care homes and the places available in these homes is published annually in the 'Statistics on Community Care for Adults in Northern Ireland' bulletin. Publications for the past fourteen years are available to download from the DHSSPS internet site at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/adult_statistics/statistics_and_research-cib-community_statistics.htm

For the five years requested, the information can be found as follows:

- 2011/12 – Table 1.16, page 61
- 2010/11 – Table 1.17, page 45
- 2009/10 – Table 1.16, page 24
- 2008/09 – Table 1.18, page 25
- 2007/08 – Table 1.18, page 25

Residential Care Homes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail every statutory residential care home, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, including the number of (i) beds; and (ii) residents in each, as of 1 September for each year since 2005.

(AQW 25949/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not held centrally and was requested from the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Table 1 below details the number of beds and residents in each statutory residential care home which caters for the elderly.

Table 1: Beds and Residents in Statutory Residential Care Homes

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
Belfast HSC Trust										
Pine Lodge*	Beds	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
	Residents	31	29	33	30	26	20	20	24	36
Killynure	Beds	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
	Residents	22	31	36	36	37	37	28	32	21
Orchardville	Beds	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Residents	16	19	24	28	27	27	27	27	27
Brae Valley	Beds	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Residents	22	24	27	27	29	25	21	22	20

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
Ballyowen	Beds	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26
	Residents	6	10	18	23	27	22	24	26	20
Bruce House	Beds	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
	Residents	4	6	11	21	28	28	28	27	20
Chestnut*	Beds	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
	Residents	13	15	22	28	39	32	22	28	21
Grovetree*	Beds	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
	Residents	15	16	18	24	38	24	23	0	0
Shankill	Beds	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
	Residents	15	21	30	31	33	24	23	7	0

* Belfast HSC Trust ceased permanent admissions to non EMI homes in 2009, therefore, figures after that time to Grovetree, Pine Lodge and Chestnut Grove refer only to temporary residents, i.e. respite or step-down.

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
Northern HSC Trust										
Roddens	Beds	-	-	-	29	29	29	29	29	-
	Residents	-	-	-	29	29	20	26	27	-
Rathmoyle	Beds	-	-	-	39	39	39	39	39	-
	Residents	-	-	-	29	29	37	30	29	-
Pinewood	Beds	-	-	-	36	36	36	36	36	-
	Residents	-	-	-	33	34	31	32	27	-
Rosedale	Beds	-	-	-	38	38	38	36	36	-
	Residents	-	-	-	34	35	32	30	28	-
Greenisland	Beds	-	-	-	31	31	31	30	30	-
	Residents	-	-	-	30	31	29	28	23	-
Clonmore	Beds	-	-	-	42	42	42	40	40	-
	Residents	-	-	-	41	41	38	38	35	-
Lisgarel	Beds	-	-	-	41	41	41	40	40	-
	Residents	-	-	-	37	37	30	39	27	-
Westlands	Beds	-	-	-	29	29	29	29	29	-
	Residents	-	-	-	27	27	27	28	26	-
Joymount	Beds	-	-	-	44	44	44	40	40	-
	Residents	-	-	-	43	40	42	39	37	-

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
South Eastern HSC Trust										
Ardview House	Beds	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39
	Residents	30	30	31	33	31	36	36	27	21
Drumlough House	Beds	40	40	40	39	39	39	39	39	39
	Residents	29	24	25	25	35	38	33	33	30

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
Grove House	Beds	34	34	34	34	34	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Residents	29	21	30	24	18	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Laurelhill House	Beds	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Residents	30	28	30	29	30	29	30	28	27
Loch Cuan	Beds	32	32	32	32	32	16	16	N/A	N/A
	Residents	24	25	22	16	15	14	8	N/A	N/A
Mount Alexander	Beds	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	37	37
	Residents	23	28	31	35	35	35	32	32	34
Newcroft Lodge	Beds	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
	Residents	20	24	27	30	28	31	31	29	24
Northfield House	Beds	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
	Residents	27	28	28	29	22	35	18	19	20
Ravara	Beds	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	N/A
	Residents	21	28	37	35	28	32	33	23	N/A
Seymour House	Beds	51	51	51	51	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Residents	47	41	44	40	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
St John's House	Beds	34	34	34	34	12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Residents	28	28	25	17	9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
Southern HSC Trust										
Slieve Roe House	Beds	-	-	-	-	17	17	17	17	17
	Residents	-	-	-	-	16	17	14	14	11
Cloughreagh house	Beds	-	-	-	-	23	23	23	23	23
	Residents	-	-	-	-	17	21	20	21	20
Roxborough House	Beds	-	-	-	-	38	30	30	30	30
	Residents	-	-	-	-	28	22	24	22	20
Skeagh House	Beds	34	34	34	34	34	24	24	24	*
	Residents	29	31	28	22	29	20	21	12	*
Crozier House	Beds	35	35	35	35	~	27	27	27	27
	Residents	29	32	27	29	15#	22	20	24	22^

Systems were not in place for data collection of this nature prior to 2009 in three residential homes * Skeagh House was temporarily evacuated in 2013 ~ Reduced capacity due to renovations at Crozier House between November 2008 and November 2009 # 9 residents were temporarily located to Skeagh House due to renovations ^ Includes 8 residents relocated from Skeagh House

Residential Home		01/09/ 2005	01/09/ 2006	01/09/ 2007	01/09/ 2008	01/09/ 2009	01/09/ 2010	01/09/ 2011	01/09/ 2012	01/09/ 2013
Western HSC Trust										
Thackeray Place	Beds	-	-	-	32	32	32	32	32	32
	Residents	-	-	-	32	30	32	30	32	32
Rectory Field	Beds	-	-	-	35	35	35	35	35	35
	Residents	-	-	-	24	25	32	27	25	24
William Street	Beds	-	-	-	27	27	27	27	27	27
	Residents	-	-	-	22	20	25	26	22	22
Greenfield	Beds	-	-	-	34	34	34	34	34	34
	Residents	-	-	-	27	32	26	32	27	24

Information prior to 2008 is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost

Residential Care Homes: Admissions

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of permanent admissions to (i) private residential care homes; and (ii) statutory residential care homes, broken down by Health and Social Care trust, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 25950/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not held centrally. Information on the number of permanent admissions to residential homes which cater for elderly clients was provided by the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and is detailed in the tables below.

Table 1: Permanent Admissions to Private Elderly Residential Homes

HSC Trust	Permanent Admissions				
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast	108	127	121	71	104
Northern	-	-	-	206	244
South Eastern	-	-	-	-	-
Southern	-	-	-	-	-
Western	-	-	-	-	-

Information could not be obtained

Table 2: Permanent Admissions to Statutory Elderly Residential Homes

HSC Trust	Permanent Admissions				
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast	34	35	26	31	8
Northern	85	67	61	39	0
South Eastern	67	54	43	44	41
Southern	24	7	22	30	22
Western	28	18	22	23	17

Desertcreat Training College

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he expects work to begin on the new Training College at Desertcreat.

(AQW 25964/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following approval of the business case in 2011, work commenced on the design element of this project.

As you will be aware the costs for this project have increased considerably, since initial approval. This has necessitated an addendum to the business case to be developed and approved by all parties (the Departments and the three services) as well as the Department of Finance and Personnel. This process is currently ongoing and only when it is complete will it be possible to confirm timings.

Prostate Cancer: Research

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department will increase the budget for research into prostate cancer.

(AQW 25975/11-15)

Mr Poots: The 5-year period from 2008-09 to 2013-14 saw more than a doubling of the amount of money allocated for prostate cancer research through the regional Health and Social Care Research & Development (HSC R&D) Fund. The precise increase is 112%. This is against a backdrop of a steady-state in the total size of our HSC R&D Fund over the same period.

Prostate cancer is an area of particular focus and expertise among research scientists and clinicians in Northern Ireland and they are attracting funds and undertaking collaborative work jointly with world-leaders. This ability to attract funds from other, larger funding pots throughout the UK or internationally is essential. Very importantly, our HSC R&D funds have been used to build up and sustain an efficient, co-ordinated health research infrastructure across the province so that patients can participate in clinical trials of potentially beneficial new diagnostics or treatments. Research is also underway on the best care for people who have a diagnosis of prostate cancer and for the many people who now survive and have fulfilling lives following prostate cancer.

Special Education: Speech Therapists

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department can take to address the shortage of speech therapists in the Special Education sector.

(AQW 25976/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency is carrying out a review of Allied Health Professions (AHP) support for children with statements of special educational needs. Speech and language therapy provision is part of this review. The 1st phase of this review is focusing on scoping AHP provision and support for children in special schools. It is envisaged that this scoping exercise will be completed by March 2014. Common themes and issues will be identified throughout and the scoping exercise will end with recommendations for further action.

I will consider the need for any action by my Department following the completion of this review.

Firefighters

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of wholetime fire fighters appointed to the retained service.

(AQW 25987/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is currently a total of 81 Wholetime Firefighters in NIFRS appointed to the Retained Service.

Legal Cases: Cost

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 24824/11-15, to detail (i) why his Department is unable to provide the details on parts (i) and (ii); (ii) the cost of all legal cases for each year since 2007; (iii) the cost of the most expensive legal case the Department lost during this time; and (iv) why his Department does not disaggregate the costs of successful and unsuccessful legal cases.

(AQW 26001/11-15)

Mr Poots: In relation to parts (i), (iii) and (iv), the Departmental Solicitor's Office has advised that the volume of legal cases in which the Department has been involved since 2007 make the keeping of statistics in relation to cost and outcome a task which would not make the resources required to undertake it a productive use of public money.

In relation to part (ii), the Department holds information centrally in relation to the total spend on legal costs from 2008-2009. This is set out below and is exclusive of VAT:

■ 2008-09 - £387,819	■ 2011-12 - £106,330
■ 2009-10 - £386,775	■ 2012-13 - £222,191
■ 2010-11 - £288,537	

Child Sexual Abuse: Children in Care

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to detail (i) how many investigations were carried out involving a claim of sexual abuse against a child in care; (ii) how many of these investigations proved that an offence was committed; (iii) how many of these cases are ongoing; and (iv) how many criminal investigations were carried out as a result of the initial investigations, for each year since 2009.

(AQW 26023/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Learning Disabilities: Southern Trust

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why young people with learning disabilities leaving special education at nineteen are only able to access the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's Daytime Opportunities and Training Services programmes following referral by a social worker; and, given some young people may not have or want contact with a social worker, whether he has any plans to broaden the referral criteria to include other healthcare professionals, such as GPs and community nurses.

(AQW 26025/11-15)

Mr Poots: Day Opportunities is a direct service which is provided by the Southern Trust to meet assessed need. Assessments are carried out by the Trust's multi-disciplinary Community Learning Disability Team of which only social workers, nurses and care managers have Key Worker responsibility and, therefore, are the only staff able to make referrals. Young people can also access information about community options from careers' advisors, Further Education Colleges and Training Organisations independently.

At present the Southern Trust has no plans in place to broaden the referral criteria to include other healthcare professionals such as GPs and community nurses.

Shale Gas Extraction: Health Impacts

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 19437/11-15, to detail (i) whether the Health Protection Agency has set a date for the release of the report into the health impacts of shale gas extraction; and (ii) whether the report also investigates shale oil and coal bed methane extraction.

(AQW 26039/11-15)

Mr Poots: Public Health England, which took over the functions of the Health Protection Agency on 1 April 2013, is currently finalising its review of the potential public health impacts of exposures to chemical and radioactive pollutants from shale gas extraction. No date is currently set for publication but it is expected shortly.

This report looks at the evidence for the potential public health effects of chemical and radiological emissions associated with shale gas extraction. It does not review either coal bed methane extraction or shale oil extraction, which are different processes.

Pinewood Residential Care Home

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 25617/11-15, when the last consultation in relation to Pinewood Residential Care Home (i) commenced; and (ii) was completed.

(AQW 26042/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Trust commenced its consultation on the Future of Statutory of Residential Care for Older People, which included Pinewood, on 26th April. On 3rd May I stopped all Trust consultation processes with regard to statutory residential homes for older people. The Northern Trust's consultation was not, therefore, completed.

The Northern Trust previously carried out the consultation entitled Reprovision of the Trust's Residential Homes for Older People, which commenced in January 2009 and finished in March 2009. This consultation document included Pinewood Residential Care Home.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Barnardo's Report 'The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland', did he refer the report to (i) The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland; (ii) The Regional Child Protection Committee, and if so, when.

(AQW 26051/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) was not established at the time of the publication of the Barnardo's report, Not a World Away, in 2011. The SBNI became operational on 17 September 2012. My Department referred the recommendations of the report to the Chair Designate of the SBNI in September 2011 for comment. Since its establishment, the SBNI has identified working with member agencies to develop a co-ordinated strategy and working model to protect and safeguard children who go missing from home and care and/or at risk of sexual exploitation as a strategic priority and, as part of the business planning process has developed a multi-agency action plan specifically linked to child sexual exploitation.

In addition, HSCB staff delivered a presentation to the members of the RCPC on the Barnardo's report Not a World Away in March 2012. The Chair Designate of the SBNI and the SBNI Director of Operations (Designate) both attended the RCPC presentation as part of a transitional arrangement.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the agencies his Department contacted, including dates, following the receipt of the Barnardo's Report 'The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland'.

(AQW 26052/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following receipt of the Barnardo's report, Not a World Away, my Department did not refer the report to any organisation or individual, with the exception of the Chair Designate of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

My officials agreed with Barnardo's staff that the recommendations contained within the report would be brought to the attention of those agencies/bodies at which they were directed and in advance of the publication of the report.

Safeguarding Board

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland was not established until September 2012, given that The Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act was passed in February 2011.

(AQW 26053/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following the passing of the Safeguarding Board (NI) Act 2011 (the Act) the Department using the powers conferred by the Act, commenced the drafting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (Membership, Procedure, Functions and Committee) Regulations which were necessary to give effect to the operation of the SBNI. The SBNI Regulations were subject to the negative resolution procedure. Their development included liaising with Departmental Solicitors Office on various drafts; consulting on and amending the Regulations following a consultation process; seeking the approval of the Executive and the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make the Regulations; attending and providing briefing papers for evidence sessions to the Committee; proofing, validating, and laying of the Regulations and drafting of a Commencement Order to bring them into operation.

In parallel with the development of the Regulatory Framework, preparations were being made to establish a new body. These included: the recruitment of the SBNI Chair, lay members, officers of the Board and voluntary sector representation on the Board; the drafting of substantial SBNI guidance, which was also subject to consultation. Following a recruitment exercise, the SBNI Chair was appointed as Chair designate from 1 July 2011, to assist in the preparations for establishment of the SBNI.

Pinewood Residential Care Home

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, including a breakdown of, the current funding arrangements for Residential Care, Respite and Rehabilitation at Pinewood Residential Care Home.

(AQW 26081/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Trust has advised that the funding allocation for Pinewood Residential Care Home is not split by Residential Care, Respite and Rehabilitation. The total allocation for 2013/14 is £939,145.

Special Needs: Southern Trust

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that every young person with learning difficulties, who is approaching transition from special needs education in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, will be given automatic access to a social worker in advance of transmission, to ensure that all available options are explored and utilised.

(AQW 26083/11-15)

Mr Poots: All children who are in special needs education within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area and meet the criteria for social services involvement would be encouraged to, and given information on, accessing a social worker by the school annual review systems. This information would be given verbally, and by leaflets, and delivered by SELB personnel, school information events for parents, Allied Health Professionals and the Trust's Transition Co-ordinators.

Those young people who are referred to the Trust's Children's Services have direct access to a social worker and the Transition Co-ordinator who, in conjunction with schools and parents/carers, plan their transition to adult services. The Transition Co-ordinators work with children and young people aged 14-25yrs.

The Transition Co-ordinators have the responsibility to act as a conduit to provide information, signpost and support young adults with a diagnosis of learning disability to appropriate services to meet their assessed need.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland has taken as a result of the Barnardo's report into 'The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland'. (AQW 26085/11-15)

Mr Poots: A numbers of actions have been undertaken by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), since it was established in September 2012, to address the issue of child sexual exploitation and which also address the recommendations contained in the 2011 Barnardo's report Not a World Away.

These include:

- writing to all Health and Social Care Trust Directors of Children's Services to attempt to establish the scale of child sexual exploitation on Northern Ireland and to assess the ongoing arrangements for responding to it. This took place within three weeks of the establishment of the SBNI in September 2012;
- the development of a Strategic Plan, which indicates that the SBNI will work with member agencies to develop a co-ordinated strategy and working model to protect and safeguard children who go missing from home and care and/or at risk of sexual exploitation.
- The development of a child sexual exploitation action plan, which sets out a number of actions to be taken by the membership of the SBNI to tackle child sexual exploitation, including:
 - the establishment of a sexual exploitation Strategic Partnership Group;
 - the identification of the scale and nature of the problem in Northern Ireland;
 - the development of an awareness raising campaign for children, families and professionals;
 - a review of the risk assessment tools currently being used;
 - the development an information sharing agreement for Child Sexual Exploitation;
 - a review existing procedures/guidance to establish any gaps;
 - working with the Knowledge Transfer Hub to identify education requirements for children, parents and professionals;
 - working with the Knowledge Transfer Hub to scope and research good models of practice and how this can be translated to Northern Ireland; and
 - evaluating and/or piloting a co-located multi-disciplinary/multi-agency team focusing on children who go missing.

The SBNI has already engaged in awareness-raising activity. In September 2013, it published and launched a number of child sexual exploitation awareness-raising leaflets for children, parents/carers and professionals in contact with children and young people. At the same time, a Child Sexual Exploitation Helpline was established. The helpline is run by the NSPCC on behalf of the Health and Social Care Board. It is dedicated to responding to concerns about child sexual exploitation from children, parents and carers.

Working Time Directive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures allow compliance with the Working Time Directive in respect of private work undertaken by Health Service consultants. (AQW 26086/11-15)

Mr Poots: Employers are not obliged to monitor private practice hours unless these fall within those identified in the individual Consultant's job plan. Any activity outside of working hours is the responsibility of the consultant, who must ensure that any private commitments do not impinge on their ability to carry out their HSC work.

Consultants who wish to undertake private work which will result in working more than 48 hours per week over a reference period can voluntarily opt-out of EWTD. This must be agreed in writing and HSC Employers must keep a record of all employees who have exercised their right to 'opt-out'. Where a consultant has agreed in writing to work additional hours there is no breach of the EWTD.

Consultants however are required to disclose information to their clinical manager of any regular commitments in respect of private professional services or fee paying services. The onus is on the consultant under 'Good Medical Practice' to ensure that they are 'fit to work'. There are no mechanisms at present to record external hours worked for consultants.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service: Recruitment

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the last recruitment to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service took place. (AQW 26119/11-15)

Mr Poots:

NIAS Frontline Operational Recruitment

	Year
Patient Client Service	2012

	Year
Paramedics in Training	2010
Emergency Medical Technician	2006
Paramedics	2012

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has no plans for further frontline operational recruitment.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust does not accept staff on transfer from other ambulance services within the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service: Recruitment

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans for further recruitment to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

(AQW 26120/11-15)

Mr Poots:

NIAS Frontline Operational Recruitment

	Year
Patient Client Service	2012
Paramedics in Training	2010
Emergency Medical Technician	2006
Paramedics	2012

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has no plans for further frontline operational recruitment.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust does not accept staff on transfer from other ambulance services within the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service: Staff Transfer

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether it is practice for the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to accept staff on transfer from other ambulance services within the United Kingdom.

(AQW 26121/11-15)

Mr Poots:

NIAS Frontline Operational Recruitment

	Year
Patient Client Service	2012
Paramedics in Training	2010
Emergency Medical Technician	2006
Paramedics	2012

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has no plans for further frontline operational recruitment.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust does not accept staff on transfer from other ambulance services within the United Kingdom.

Premature Deaths: Air Pollution

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 22654/11-15, for his assessment of the annual number of premature deaths since 2003 as a result of air pollution.

(AQW 26130/11-15)

Mr Poots: Estimates have not been made on a year-by-year basis. The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) report 'The Mortality Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Particulate Air Pollution in the United Kingdom', published in 2010, estimated the mortality burden of long-term exposure to man-made particulate air pollution in 2008 in the UK as equivalent to nearly 29,000 deaths. The mortality burden in 2008 in Northern Ireland was estimated as equivalent to 502 deaths. The COMEAP report is available on-line at: <http://www.comeap.org.uk/documents/reports>.

Slievemore Nursing Unit

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future of the Slievemore Nursing Unit, Derry.

(AQW 26154/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Western Trust has advised that, in the context of no new demand for Slievemore Nursing Unit and the expansion of community based services such as the Challenging Behaviour Service, the Trust foresees no future need for Slievemore.

I am aware, however, of the concerns of the families of the remaining patients in Slievemore regarding their future care. To that end, I have asked the Commissioner for Older People to liaise between the Trust and the remaining patients in Slievemore, and their families, to discuss the way forward.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Parking

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions are being taken to provide adequate car parking spaces at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 26164/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust has created a temporary car park with some 300 spaces on the Broadway Towers site. This car park is utilised as an overflow car park where there is pressure on existing spaces on the main Royal Hospitals site. In addition, the Trust has brought a number of car park areas into its control to help ease congestion and improve visitor capacity on site. This included releasing an additional 60 spaces in the main visitors' car park.

The Belfast Trust is planning to provide a long term, sustainable, affordable and accessible car parking solution for patients, staff and visitors. This will be subject to business case approval and availability of funding.

To help reduce demand for car parking spaces, a number of measures have been promoted e.g.

- cycle to work schemes
- use of park and ride facilities
- use of cross site bus service
- walking to work

South West Acute Hospital: Subcontractors

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any subcontractors remain unpaid following the building of the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 26166/11-15)

Mr Poots: The main contractor on the South West Acute Hospital, FCC Elliott, has confirmed that no monies are due to any of the sub-contractors who worked on the project.

Omagh Hospital: Acute Mental Health Facility

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the second phase of the new local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh for the Acute Mental Health Facility.

(AQW 26171/11-15)

Mr Poots: Phase 2 of the local hospital in Omagh was previously planned to be a second mental health in-patient unit for the Western Trust area.

In my statement to the Assembly on 19 March 2013, I confirmed that the business case for the second acute mental health unit in the Western Trust area will examine options for the location of the unit. In line with this, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is currently undertaking an appraisal of the two suggested locations for the unit.

Consultation has taken place with local clinicians, and further consultation is planned with the Western Local Commissioning Group which includes representation from local council, health professionals and the community and voluntary sector. The HSCB are due to report to me with their advice before the end of December 2013.

Western Trust: Budget Deficit

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he will take to ensure that front line services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust are not affected by the Trust addressing its budget deficit.

(AQW 26173/11-15)

Mr Poots: A key objective for my Department and HSC organisations is to live within the resources allocated by the Executive, and in that context, the Western Trust, like other Trusts, is currently developing plans to ensure that it achieves financial breakeven in 2013/14. At the same time all Trusts must continue to protect and improve the safety and quality of their services.

At this stage, the Western Trust's plans are in draft form and there is ongoing engagement between the Health and Social Care Board and the Trust in order to finalise them for my consideration.

Ulster Hospital: Development

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the planned development of the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 26197/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is currently a major programme of redevelopment work ongoing at the Ulster Hospital. Work has already commenced on the new generic ward block on the site. Construction of the new ward block is expected to take 3 years to complete and will provide 12 generic wards, a new day surgery department, an endoscopy suite and a new pharmacy department. It is due to be completed in 2016 and open to patients in early 2017.

The next major stage of redevelopment is the construction of a new acute services block. Work on this is due to start on site in September 2014. The acute block will provide a new emergency department, assessment unit, imaging, and acute wards and is expected to be completed by the end of 2017.

A new mental health unit and, in the longer term, a further redevelopment phase, is planned, subject to budgetary availability and business case approval.

Ulster Hospital: Modernisation

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what further modernisation and improvements have yet to be carried out at the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 26199/11-15)

Mr Poots: Significant investment of some £232m, in the redevelopment of the generic ward and acute services blocks, is currently ongoing on the Ulster Hospital site.

There is no timeframe agreed at present for any further significant upgrade or replacement work, beyond the completion of these works, at the Ulster Hospital. Future plans will include replacement of children's department and acute treatment centre. Also planned is a new in-patient psychiatric unit on the site.

Any future works will, of course, be subject to business case approval and the identification of appropriate funding.

Greenisland House

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what form the replacement facility will take on the site of Greenisland House.

(AQW 26201/11-15)

Mr Poots: The redevelopment of the site of Greenisland House will provide supported living accommodation for older people. The Northern Trust anticipates that the supported living scheme will be completed by 2015.

Rare Diseases

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients are diagnosed with a rare disease.

(AQW 26204/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of patients diagnosed with a rare disease is not available.

DHSSPS: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 26223/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since 2007 there have been 16 North South Ministerial Council meetings attended by Ministers for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 10 of which were in Health and Food Safety sectoral format, 4 in Plenary format and 2 in Agriculture sectoral format.

In the period in question, Ministers for Health, Social Services and Public Safety have also attended 4 meetings with UK Ministers and 10 meetings with Republic of Ireland Ministers.

My Department does not collate centrally information on bi-lateral meetings which have taken place at official level.

Arc Project

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Southern Health and Social Care Trusts Arc project; and what plans or discussions are under way to provide more projects like this across the Trust area.

(AQW 26237/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern HSC Trust has advised that the ARC (Animal Rehoming Centre) project has proved very successful as a base for day opportunities which include animal husbandry, horticulture and an environmental project. Some clients have moved into work placement as a direct result of their attendance.

The Trust has advised however, that it has no plans to roll this project out to other areas of the Trust at present.

The HSC Board is currently consulting on a new regional day opportunities model for adults with a learning disability. The proposed model sets out a way forward to promote the improvement of day time support activities across the region on an equitable basis.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Rathlin Island

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any lessons to be learned as to how the Fire and Rescue Service deals with gorse fires, particularly in relation to the fires on Rathlin Island in early 2013.

(AQW 26253/11-15)

Mr Poots: NIFRS has conducted a post incident review of the Rathlin Island gorse fires in May 2013, and has identified a number of matters which will be brought forward before the next wildfire season (Spring 2014). These matters include:

- Establishing key stakeholder partnerships to provide fire prevention advice to residents and visitors to the island;
- Identifying best practice in terms of pre-planning and response options to make effective use of limited resources;
- Improving arrangements for allocation and management of resources; and,
- In the longer term, embarking on a research and development project to identify equipment suited to using sea water as an extinguishing agent.

Additionally, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has invested significant time, equipment and finance to deal with gorse fires including the purchase of specialised equipment. NIFRS' personnel have attended wildfire training courses and a Standard Operating Procedure for Wildfires has been produced.

Evish Ward, Grangewood

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nursing staff requirements at the Evish facility, Grangewood; and whether these requirements are being met.

(AQW 26267/11-15)

Mr Poots: The funded staff establishment for the Evish Ward at Grangewood Hospital is for 25 staff, comprised of 18 first level Registered Mental Health Nurses and 7 Health Care Assistants. There have been no significant vacancy factors since the unit opened. The staff rota is managed and overseen by the Charge Nurse who, when unplanned absences occur, ensures there is adequate staff cover within the unit to provide safe and effective care to all inpatients on the ward at the time.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Surgical Procedures

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current waiting time for each orthopaedic surgical procedure at Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 26270/11-15)

Mr Poots: The waiting times for each procedure in the Trauma and Orthopaedic (T & O) Surgery specialty at Altnagelvin Hospital, as at the 30th June 2013, the most recent information for which official statistics are available, are detailed in the table below.

Number of patients for inpatient admission in the T & O Specialty at Altnagelvin Hospital, at 30th June 2013, by Intended Primary Procedure

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
A60.8	Destruction Of Peripheral Nerve - Other Specified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
A65.1	Release Of Entrapment Of Peripheral Nerve At Wrist - Carpal Tunnel Release	32	27	9	*	*	*	77
A65.8	Release Of Entrapment Of Peripheral Nerve At Wrist - Other Specified	7	*	*	0	0	*	13
A67.1	Release Of Entrapment Of Peripheral Nerve At Other Site - Cubital Tunnel Release	0	5	*	*	0	*	9
A68.3	Other Release Of Peripheral Nerve - Neurolysis Of Peripheral Nerve And Transposition Of Peripheral Nerve	0	0	0	*	0	0	*
O10.8	Complex Reconstruction Of Shoulder - Other Specified	0	0	*	*	0	0	*
O21.8	Total Prosthetic Replacement Elbow Joint Using Cement - Other Specified	0	*	0	*	0	*	5
S06.8	Other Excision Of Lesion Of Skin - Other Specified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
S06.9	Other Excision Of Lesion Of Skin - Unspecified	*	*	0	0	0	0	*
S43.4	Removal Of Repair Material From Skin - Removal Of Suture From Skin Nec	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
S45.6	Removal Of Other Substance From Skin - Removal Of Foreign Body From Skin Nec	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
S64.1	Extirpation Of Nail Bed - Excision Of Nail Bed	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
T51.2	Excision Of Fascia Of Abdomen - Excision Of Fascia Of Pelvis	0	0	0	0	*	0	*
T52.1	Excision Of Other Fascia - Palmar Fasciectomy	18	11	8	8	*	*	50
T59.1	Excision Of Ganglion - Excision Of Ganglion Of Wrist	*	*	0	0	0	0	*
T59.2	Excision Of Ganglion - Excision Of Ganglion Of Hand Nec	*	*	0	0	*	*	7
T59.3	Excision Of Ganglion - Excision Of Ganglion Of Knee	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
T59.4	Excision Of Ganglion - Excision Of Ganglion Of Foot	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
T62.2	Operations On Bursa - Excision Of Bursa Nec	0	0	0	0	*	*	*
T62.5	Operations On Bursa - Injection Into Bursa	*	*	0	0	0	0	*
T62.8	Operations On Bursa - Other Specified	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
T64.1	Transposition Of Tendon - Multiple Transfer Of Tendon To Tendon	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
T64.2	Transposition Of Tendon - Transfer Of Tendon To Tendon Nec	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
T64.9	Transposition Of Tendon - Unspecified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
T69.1	Freeing Of Tendon - Primary Tenolysis	0	0	0	0	*	0	*
T69.9	Freeing Of Tendon - Unspecified	*	*	0	*	0	0	5
T70.2	Adjustment To Length Of Tendon - Tenotomy Nec	*	0	0	*	0	0	*
T70.5	Adjustment To Length Of Tendon - Lengthening Of Tendon	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
T72.3	Other Operations On Sheath Of Tendon - Release Of Constriction Of Sheath Of Tendon	9	*	5	*	*	0	21
T72.9	Other Operations On Sheath Of Tendon - Unspecified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
T74.3	Other Operations On Tendon - Exploration Of Tendon Nec	*	0	0	0	0	*	*
T74.8	Other Operations On Tendon - Other Specified	*	0	0	*	0	0	5
T79.8	Repair Of Muscle - Other Specified	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
T80.9	Release Of Contracture Of Muscle - Unspecified	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
T96.2	Other Operations On Soft Tissue - Excision Of Lesion Of Soft Tissue Nec	*	*	*	*	*	*	17
W03.1	Complex Reconstruction Of Forefoot - Excision Of Heads Of Multiple Lesser Metatarsals	0	0	0	*	0	0	*
W03.5	Complex Reconstruction Of Forefoot - Localised Fusion Of Joints Of Midfoot And Forefoot	0	*	0	0	0	*	*
W03.6	Complex Reconstruction Of Forefoot - Osteotomy Of Multiple Metatarsals And Fixation Hfq	0	0	0	*	0	0	*
W03.8	Complex Reconstruction Of Forefoot - Other Specified	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
W03.9	Complex Reconstruction Of Forefoot - Unspecified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W04.2	Complex Reconstruction Of Hindfoot - Triple Fusion Of Joints Of Hindfoot	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W06.8	Total Excision Of Bone - Other Specified	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W06.9	Total Excision Of Bone - Unspecified	5	*	*	*	*	*	17
W08.3	Other Excision Of Bone - Excision Of Excrecence Of Bone	*	*	0	*	0	*	9
W08.5	Other Excision Of Bone - Partial Excision Of Bone Nec	0	0	*	*	0	0	*
W08.8	Other Excision Of Bone - Other Specified	*	0	*	*	0	0	*
W09.1	Extirpation Of Lesion Of Bone - Excision Of Lesion Of Bone Nec	*	*	*	*	0	0	7

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
W15.3	Division Of Bone Of Foot - Osteotomy Of First Metatarsal Bone Nec	*	*	*	*	*	0	9
W15.5	Division Of Bone Of Foot - Osteotomy Of Midfoot Tarsal Bone	*	0	0	0	*	0	*
W15.8	Division Of Bone Of Foot - Other Specified	5	*	*	0	0	0	7
W16.9	Other Division Of Bone - Unspecified	5	*	*	*	0	0	11
W20.1	Primary Open Reduction Of Fracture Of Bone And Extramed - Primary Open Reduct/Fracture/Long Bone/Extramed/ Fix Using	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W20.3	Primary Open Reduction Of Fracture Of Bone And Extramed - Primary Open Reduct/Fracture/Long Bone/Extramed/ Fix Using	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W20.9	Primary Open Reduction Of Fracture Of Bone And Extramed - Unspecified	*	6	*	0	*	*	14
W23.8	Secondary Open Reduction Of Fracture Of Bone - Other Specified	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W28.1	Other Internal Fixation Of Bone - Application Of Internal Fixation To Bone Nec	*	0	*	*	*	*	8
W28.2	Other Internal Fixation Of Bone - Adjustment To Internal Fixation Of Bone Nec	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W28.3	Other Internal Fixation Of Bone - Removal Of Internal Fixation From Bone Nec	7	9	7	6	*	8	40
W28.8	Other Internal Fixation Of Bone - Other Specified	0	*	0	*	0	0	*
W30.3	Other External Fixation Of Bone - Removal Of External Fixation From Bone Nec	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W32.9	Other Graft Of Bone - Unspecified	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W36.2	Diagnostic Puncture Of Bone - Needle Biopsy Of Lesion Of Bone Nec	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W37		0	0	*	0	0	0	*
W37.1	Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Using Cement - Primary Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Using Cem	58	66	64	44	28	98	358
W38.1	Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Not Using Cem - Primary Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Not Usin	0	*	*	0	0	0	*
W39.1	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint - Primary Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Nec	0	0	0	0	*	*	*

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
W39.3	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint - Revision Of Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Nec	*	*	*	*	*	9	20
W39.4	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint - Attention To Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint Nec	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W39.6	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Hip Joint - Closed Reduction Of Dislocated Total Prosthetic Replacement	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W40.1	Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Using Cement - Primary Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Using C	48	55	45	36	16	109	309
W40.3	Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Using Cement - Revision Of Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Usi	0	*	*	*	0	*	8
W40.9	Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Using Cement - Unspecified	0	0	0	*	0	0	*
W42.1	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint - Primary Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Nec	*	*	*	*	*	*	16
W42.3	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint - Revision Of Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Knee Joint Nec	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W45.1	Other Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Other Joint - Primary Total Prosthetic Replacement Of Joint Nec	*	*	0	0	*	*	7
W48.3	Other Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Femur - Revision Of Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Femur Nec	0	*	0	0	*	*	*
W48.8	Other Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Femur - Other Specified	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W49.4	Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Humerus Using Cement - Resurfacing Hemiarthroplasty Of Head Of Humerus Using Cemen	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W51.1	Other Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Humerus - Primary Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Humerus Nec	*	5	0	*	*	5	13
W51.5	Other Prosthetic Replacement Of Head Of Humerus - Resurfacing Hemiarthroplasty Of Head Of Humerus Nec	0	0	0	0	*	*	*
W56.2	Other Interposition Reconstruction Of Joint - Primary Interposition Arthroplasty Of Joint Nec	0	*	0	0	0	0	*

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
W57.2	Excision Reconstruction Of Joint - Primary Excision Arthroplasty Of Joint Nec	0	0	*	*	0	0	*
W57.3	Excision Reconstruction Of Joint - Revision Of Excision Arthroplasty Of Joint	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W58.1	Other Reconstruction Of Joint - Primary Resurfacing Arthroplasty Of Joint	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W59.3	Fusion Of Joint Of Toe - Fusion Of First Metatarsophalangeal Joint Nec	*	*	*	0	0	*	9
W59.5	Fusion Of Joint Of Toe - Fusion Of Interphalangeal Joint Of Toe Nec	11	5	5	*	0	7	30
W62.9	Other Primary Fusion Of Other Joint - Unspecified	10	8	6	5	0	10	39
W72.4	Prosthetic Replacement Of Ligament - Prosthetic Replacement Of Intra-Articular Ligament Nec	5	*	*	*	*	*	12
W74.3	Other Reconstruction Of Ligament - Reconstruction Of Extra-Articular Ligament Nec	*	0	*	0	*	*	6
W74.8	Other Reconstruction Of Ligament - Other Specified	*	*	*	0	0	0	*
W74.9	Other Reconstruction Of Ligament - Unspecified	0	0	0	*	0	0	*
W77.1	Stabilising Operations On Joint - Repair Of Capsule Of Joint For Stabilisation Of Joint Nec	*	5	*	*	*	*	23
W77.2	Stabilising Operations On Joint - Transposition Of Muscle For Stabilisation Of Joint	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
W77.9	Stabilising Operations On Joint - Unspecified	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W78.4	Release Of Contracture Of Joint - Limited Release Of Contracture Of Capsule Of Joint	5	*	0	*	0	*	8
W78.5	Release Of Contracture Of Joint - Release Of Contracture Of Elbow Joint	0	0	*	0	*	0	*
W78.9	Release Of Contracture Of Joint - Unspecified	*	0	*	0	0	0	*
W79.2	Soft Tissue Operations On Joint Of Toe - Excision Of Bunion Nec	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W81.1	Other Open Operations On Joint - Excision Of Lesion Of Joint Nec	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W81.5	Other Open Operations On Joint - Exploration Of Joint Nec	*	*	0	0	0	*	5
W81.8	Other Open Operations On Joint - Other Specified	8	*	0	0	0	*	13

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
W82.2	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Semilunar Cartilag - Endoscopic Resection Of Semilunar Cartilage Nec	*	14	7	6	0	*	35
W82.3	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Semilunar Cartilag - Endoscopic Repair Of Semilunar Cartilage	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W84.1	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Other Joint Struct - Endoscopic Repair Of Intra-Articular Ligament	8	8	6	*	*	5	30
W84.4	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Other Joint Struct - Endoscopic Decompression Of Joint	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
W84.8	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Other Joint Struct - Other Specified	31	30	12	21	6	24	124
W85.1	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Cavity Of Knee Joi - Endoscopic Removal Of Loose Body From Knee Joint	*	0	0	*	0	*	*
W85.2	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Cavity Of Knee Joi - Endoscopic Irrigation Of Knee Joint	*	*	0	0	0	*	6
W85.8	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Cavity Of Knee Joi - Other Specified	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W86.8	Therapeutic Endoscopic Operations On Cavity Of Other Jo - Other Specified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W87.1	Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Knee Joint - Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Knee Joint And Biopsy	44	53	19	6	*	16	139
W87.8	Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Knee Joint - Other Specified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W87.9	Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Knee Joint - Unspecified	31	12	*	*	*	*	52
W88		0	0	0	0	*	0	*
W88.1	Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Other Joint - Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Joint And Biopsy Of Les	5	*	*	*	*	*	15
W88.8	Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Other Joint - Other Specified	*	*	0	*	0	0	8
W88.9	Diagnostic Endoscopic Examination Of Other Joint - Unspecified	*	0	*	0	0	*	*
W89.1	Other Therapeutic End.Operations On Other Art.Cartilage - Endoscopic Chondroplasty Nec	0	*	0	0	0	0	*
W90.1	Puncture Of Joint - Aspiration Of Joint	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
W90.3	Puncture Of Joint - Injection Of Therapeutic Substance Into Joint	15	7	16	9	*	*	52
W91.9	Other Manipulation Of Joint - Unspecified	0	*	0	0	*	*	5

Intended Primary Procedure Code	Intended Primary Procedure Description	Patients Waiting for Admission, by Weeks Waiting						Total Number of Patients Waiting
		0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-30	>30	
X09.5	Amputation Of Leg - Amputation Of Leg Below Knee	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
X11.2	Amputation Of Toe - Amputation Of Phalanx Of Toe	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
X23.8	Correction Of Congenital Deformity Of Leg - Other Specified	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
X27.9	Correction Of Minor Congenital Deformity Of Foot - Unspecified	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
Y06.4	Excision Of Lesion Of Organ Noc - Excision Of Scar Tissue Noc	0	0	0	*	0	0	*
Z09.4	Peripheral Nerve Of Arm - Ulna Nerve	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
Z09.5	Peripheral Nerve Of Arm - Posterior Interosseous Nerve	*	0	0	0	0	0	*
Z72.2	Other Bone Of Arm Or Wrist - Scaphoid Bone	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
Z81.2	Joint Of Shoulder Girdle Or Arm - Acromioclavicular Joint	*	*	*	*	0	0	*
Z81.4	Joint Of Shoulder Girdle Or Arm - Shoulder Joint	0	0	0	0	0	*	*
Total		445	417	267	203	98	373	1,803

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

*Cells containing less than five have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

GP Services: Waringstown

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 23631/11-15, why the closure of Waringstown Branch Surgery was described as temporary; and to outline why it has taken more than a year to provide options for the future of GP Service provision for the people of Donaghcloney and Waringstown.

(AQW 26322/11-15)

Mr Poots: The closure of Waringstown branch surgery was described as temporary because the viability of re-opening the surgery was the subject of an options appraisal developed by Donaghcloney surgery which examined all potential proposals for the future provision of general medical services for the patients in the Donaghcloney and Waringstown area.

The process of developing the options appraisal has required significant consultation with the Health and Social Care Board, the landlord of the Waringstown property, patients and other stakeholders. The primary aim of this work is to ensure that the options appraisal delivers better outcomes for patients in the medium to long term through the provision of safe, modern and sustainable quality services.

Throughout this time the Donaghcloney Practice has worked hard to ensure that the day to day work and delivery of patient services has been maintained and developed.

GP Services: Donaghcloney

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the recent public meeting convened by the Health and Social Care Board regarding the future of Donaghcloney Surgery, whether he will expedite the funding for a new surgery for Donaghcloney and Waringstown, given the impact of the continued temporary closure of Waringstown Branch Surgery on 28 August 2012.

(AQW 26323/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Donaghcloney practice is seeking the views of patients, until the end of October, on an option appraisal for the future development of services within the area, following which it will submit a final option appraisal to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) for consideration.

The HSCB, through its Local Commissioning Groups, has been asked to ascertain appropriate service models to deliver against the challenges set out in Transforming Your Care and identify the priorities across Northern Ireland for the associated primary care infrastructure requirements.

The HSCB will commence meetings in October with GP practices in the Lurgan area, including Donaghcloney surgery, to discuss the potential service model and associated primary care infrastructure requirements to deliver Transforming Your Care in this area.

The HSCB will be prioritising further tranches of 'hub' and 'spoke' infrastructure developments from this point forward with a view to having a fifth and final tranche of developments commissioned by 2015.

GP Services: Donaghcloney

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the recent public meeting convened by the Health and Social Care Board on the future of Donaghcloney Surgery, at which a new surgery for Donaghcloney and Waringstown was discussed, when such a facility will (i) receive the necessary funding; and (ii) open to patients.

(AQW 26324/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am not in a position to advise when such a facility will receive the necessary funding or when it will be open to patients.

I refer the Member to my written response to AQW 26323/11-15.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service: Stations

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the locations where ambulances are stationed, in the North Down area.

(AQW 26344/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has ambulances stationed at:

- Bangor Ambulance Station, 92 Newtownards Road, Bangor, BT19 1SZ;
- Bregenz House, Bangor Marino, BT20 5ED (deployment point); and
- 2A Sullivan Place, Holywood (deployment point)

Mental Health: Prescription Drugs

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total monetary value of prescription drugs for patients who suffer from mental health difficulties.

(AQW 26366/11-15)

Mr Poots: Most drugs used in the treatment of people with mental health problems fall into 3 broad categories – anti-anxiety drugs, anti-depressants and anti-psychotics and mood stabilisers. In 2012 the total costs of drugs dispensed in these categories was £30.5 million.

A breakdown of these costs is shown in the table below:

Category	Ingredient Cost Before Discount
Hypnotics and anxiolytics	£4,754,697.33
drugs associated with psychoses and related disorders	£12,378,318.29
Antidepressant drugs	£13,368,983.86
Total	£30,501,999.48

Source: Prescription Cost Analysis NI 2012

Young People: Obesity

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what steps his Department is taking to reduce youth obesity; and (ii) what discussions he has had with the Minister of Education on addressing the issue of obesity amongst young people.

(AQW 26383/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) My Department is taking forward a number of steps to reduce obesity in children and young people through the obesity prevention framework, A Fitter Future for All (launched 12 March 2013), which seeks to prevent and address obesity across the life course.

In supporting the delivery of the Framework, the Public Health Agency, along with other key stakeholders, are taking forward a range of programmes and initiatives aimed at encouraging participation in physical activity, promoting healthy eating, and preventing and addressing obesity with a particular focus on children and young people.

- (ii) In taking forward A Fitter Future for All, my Department continues to work closely with the Department of Education in tackling this issue. In particular, the two Departments worked together to develop the new Food in Schools Policy, which was launched on 17 September 2013. This is an overarching policy advocating a 'whole school approach' to all food provided in schools, and to the development of the necessary knowledge and skills in relation to healthy eating and lifestyles. My Department continues to be represented on the Food in Schools Forum. Furthermore, my Department is supportive of the continued delivery of the Curriculum Sports Programme.

GP Services: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average (i) GP to patient ratio; and (ii) waiting time for an appointment with a GP, in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 26451/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Figures provided by the Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit in the HSC Business Services Organisation show that as at July 2013, the average GP to patient ratio was 1:1650 for North Down Westminster Parliamentary Constituency (WPC) area.

The ratio was calculated using the headcount of principal and salaried GPs working at practices located in North Down WPC, as whole time equivalent figures are not available. Locums were not included.

The patient population used in the calculation was the number of patients registered with practices located within North Down WPC; it should be noted that patients may not reside in the WPC in which they are registered.

- (ii) The information requested is not available.

Department of Justice

Prisons: Self-harm and Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24239/11-15, whether he wishes to review his answer given that the Director General stated in May 2013 that the new Managing Serious Self Harm and Deaths in Custody Policy is currently being drafted.

(AQW 25729/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I do not wish to revise my answer to AQW/24239/11-15.

The current Northern Ireland Prison Service Suicide and Self Harm Prevention policy remains valid. A review of the policy will be taken forward as part of the wider reform programme.

National Crime Agency

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the National Crime Agency.

(AQW 25808/11-15)

Mr Ford: The National Crime Agency (NCA) will come into operation on 7 October 2013. Its role here, while still important, will be significantly limited compared to that in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is because, in spite of proposals I have tabled setting out how it should fit with our local arrangements, agreement has not been reached on these. As a result NCA officers will not be able to conduct investigations on devolved matters and the NCA's role in respect of civil recovery will be considerably hampered.

Efforts are being made to minimise the impact of the deficit, but I remain firmly of the view that we need to reach agreement on a model which, while respecting local policing architecture, will enable us to benefit from the full range of the NCA's skills and expertise in our fight against serious and organised crime. I will continue to press for that agreement.

Prisons: Self-harm and Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24919/11-15 and given the primary difference between the formal and informal review process, together with the Director General's statement of May 2013 when she stated that the new Managing Serious Self-Harm and Deaths in Custody Policy is currently being drafted, in response to the Prisoner Ombudsman's Report into the near Death In Custody of Mr Lavery at Maghaberry in which the Ombudsman articulated the clear need for review of how vulnerable prisoners are dealt with, whether this new policy of such high importance is being drafted without recourse to a proper formal review.

(AQW 25816/11-15)

Mr Ford: The comments attributed to the Director General were made in response to the Prisoner Ombudsman's report on the death in custody of Mr Joseph Abraham who died whilst in the custody of Magilligan Prison. One issue of concern had been identified for the Prison Service and the Director General wrote to the Prisoner Ombudsman indicating that work was being taken forward to address the issue in relation to the support and aftercare for staff following such incidents.

As part of the informal review process, lessons learned from this report and other external inspection reports were incorporated in internal operational working papers to help inform the future development of safer custody policies and procedures and to identify areas where further guidance on the interpretation of the current Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Policy would be required.

This operational work is ongoing and does not constitute a formal review of the Prison Service's Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Policy.

Suicide prevention continues to be a key priority for the Prison Service and the current policy remains valid. As previously advised in AQW/25729/11-15, a formal review of the Prison Service's Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Policy will be taken forward in due course, in consultation with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Flags: Government Buildings

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what security precautions are in place for staff who are involved in the flying and removal of Union Flags on Government buildings during designated days.
(AQW 25872/11-15)

Mr Ford: The raising and lowering of the Union flag on designated days is carried out under contract by G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Limited (G4S). The security of G4S staff is a matter for their employer. Prior to the commencement of the contract G4S carried out risk assessments and site surveys across all courthouses, no issues regarding staff security were raised with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. If required, G4S staff liaise with PSNI on any security concerns.

Noel Parker: Temporary Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the temporary release of Noel Parker to attend a wedding, whether this featured in the redacted report into the operational running and closure of the Prisoner Assessment Unit, and if so, why it was necessary to redact.

(AQW 25876/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Parker's temporary release did not feature in the report into the operational running and closure of the Prisoner Assessment Unit.

Sexual Offences: Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case number 13/078784 at Dungannon Magistrates Court, what monitoring was carried out on the dates between 28 September 2012 and 24 July 2013, including the number of visits by the designated risk manager.

(AQW 25878/11-15)

Mr Ford: The monitoring of sexual offences orders 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.

Prison Service: Target Operating Model

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to details how the Northern Ireland Prison Service Target Operating Model differs from the superseded system.

(AQW 25879/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new operating model for NIPS encompasses four key elements: the Staff Deployment Agreement, the staffing structure, the staffing profile and the shift patterns. In combination this will deliver a sustainable model for NIPS to deliver efficiently and effectively.

The Staff Deployment Agreement was developed to replace the Framework Agreement following negotiations between NIPS and the POA. It sets out working practices that can support a progressive and purposeful regime that is focussed on rehabilitation and has been in operation since July 2012.

The new operating model has allowed NIPS, in agreement with the POA, to develop a flatter, leaner management structure, moving to three non-uniform Management grades as opposed to five and to one uniform supervisor grade instead of two.

New staffing profiles and shift systems were introduced on 15 October 2012. Key elements include reduced non effective time and jurisdictionally comparable staff-prisoner ratios. Ongoing reviews and updating of the shift patterns and profiles are a normal part of prison operations and reflect changing needs and the requirements for regime delivery.

Prison Service: Fraud and Assault

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1634/11-15, why the Northern Ireland Prison Service have not referred allegations of fraud and assault to the PSNI for investigation, given that upon conviction, offenders may be sentenced to imprisonment.

(AQW 25972/11-15)

Mr Ford: None of the cases alluded to in the response to AQW/1634/11-15 were considered appropriate for referral to the PSNI. They were properly dealt with under the internal disciplinary processes.

However, since the response to AQW/1634/11-15 was given the Northern Ireland Prison Service has referred some new cases of alleged misconduct to the PSNI for investigation.

Legal Aid: Change of Plea

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how he will ensure that legally aided defendants, who plead not guilty to a charge requiring the expense of preparation for a contest, but subsequently change their plea on the day of hearing, are made financially liable for costs incurred in preparing for the case.

(AQW 25977/11-15)

Mr Ford: Criminal legal aid is granted by the court under the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 ("the 1981 Order"). Where a grant is made, the defendant is entitled to free legal aid in the preparation and conduct of his defence. Under the 1981 Order there is no provision for the defendant to make a contribution to the costs of his defence. At present, I have no plans to change this position.

Prison Service: Report and Accounts 2009-2010

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24598/11-15, whether the information provided by the then Director General in the Northern Ireland Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10 was incorrect, and if so, to outline how inaccurate information was published.

(AQW 25979/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since my answer to AQW24598/11-15 the Northern Ireland Prison Service has continued to look into the basis for the statement made in the 2009/10 NIPS Annual Report, and has located the central record of self-harm incidents dating from April 2009 which is referred to in that Report. Prior to 2010 the Prison Record Information System (PRISM) did not support the electronic recording of self-harm incidents. This information was recorded manually until PRISM was developed to initiate the recording of all incidents of self-harm.

Sexual Assault: Rowan Referral Centre

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether funding has been secured for an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor for The Rowan Assault Referral Centre; and if this role will include a therapeutic intervention.

(AQW 26003/11-15)

Mr Ford: The opening of the Rowan, Northern Ireland's regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre, is a significant step forward in supporting all victims of sexual violence and abuse and it is very much welcomed. It is an excellent example of partnership working between all of the relevant Departments and Agencies.

The Rowan opened in May 2013, initially for PSNI referrals only. Since the beginning of September The Rowan has extended its services to self-referrals and third party referrals.

Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) are intended to be specialist support workers who assist and help victims of sexual assault and abuse in the weeks and months after an assault. Work is ongoing between my officials and key stakeholders to define the role of ISVAs and a clear specification for an ISVA service in Northern Ireland will be developed as the work of The Rowan evolves.

In order to secure funding for the ISVA service, my Department is required to produce a robust business case. An agreed specification in conjunction with operational data, which will continue to be collected over the forthcoming months, will be fundamental to inform this work.

In the interim, The Rowan will refer victims to the appropriate support services with their consent, and into statutory services where this is mandatory.

Legal Cases: Cost

Mr Agnew asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24826/11-15, to detail (i) why his Department is unable to provide the information for section (i); (ii) the total cost of all legal cases in each year since his Department was established; (iii) the cost of the most expensive case his Department lost during this time; and (iv) why his Department does not disaggregate legal case costs.

(AQW 26037/11-15)

Mr Ford: As previously stated with regard to AQ 24826/11-15 the data is held in a format from which the information requested could only be provided by undertaking additional work at disproportionate cost.

There is currently no accounting or business requirement for the Department to record the information required to specifically answer this AQ. Neither Internal Audit nor the Northern Ireland Audit Office request these details for audit purposes. Additionally there is no requirement to submit a return to DFP as would be the case with External Consultancy costs and for which systems are in place to capture the information.

Desertcreat Training College

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice when work will begin on the new Training College at Desertcreat.
(AQW 26044/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I stated in the Assembly on 24 September I have already approved the business case and sought Executive approval for the Desertcreat project by way of an urgent procedure. Assuming that it is approved in the immediate future, on-site works could begin in February 2014.

Prison Service: Disciplinary Issues

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21771/11-15, (i) why such statistical information is being withheld given he provided similar information in the answer to AQW 8438/11-15; and (a) there is no general identifier of any person; (b) no breach of the Data Protection Principles (c) the legislative rights of access to information; and (d) the inconsistency of the Northern Ireland Prison Service in applying the basis for refusal; and (ii) to outline the reason for this change.
(AQW 26068/11-15)

Mr Ford: There has been no change in my approach to answering questions. AQW/21771/11-15 did not ask for statistical information. It asked for an overview of how all disciplinary cases have been managed since January 2012 and the response explained that until the new Professional Standards Unit was established all disciplinary cases would be managed under the existing disciplinary system.

Since January 2012 the Northern Ireland Prison Service has dealt with and concluded 57 disciplinary cases. There are currently ten disciplinary cases. As these cases all happened before the launch of the new disciplinary system they are all being managed under the previous Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Prisons: Self-harm and Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24760/11-15, to detail (i) when the drafting of the new Northern Ireland Prison Service policy on Managing Serious Self Harm and Deaths in Custody commenced; (ii) the proposed date of implementation; and (iii) the current status of the policy.
(AQW 26069/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the member to the answers I provided to AQW 25729/11-15 and AQW 25816/11-15.

Prisons: Self-harm and Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24432/11-15, whether he will review his answer given the acceptance by the Director General of the Prisoner Ombudsman's 'Issue of Concern Requiring Action No (2)' in relation to the lack of adequate support to staff and available evidence that management were not clear about what action should be taken to support staff affected by deaths in custody, coupled with the Director General's response when she stated, "The importance of firstly advising staff of the range of support available, and secondly, the proper provision of support and after care will be specifically mentioned in the new Managing Serious Self Harm and Deaths In Custody policy which is currently being drafted".
(AQW 26093/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have reviewed the previous response to AQW/24432/11-15 and I am satisfied that the information provided by Magilligan officials was accurate. Policies and procedures are in place and the Governor of Magilligan Prison did speak personally to the staff involved.

The response provided by the Director General of the Prison Service was an acknowledgement that more needs to be done to ensure staff are made fully aware of the support services available to them. The support services available to staff will be specifically mentioned in the new Serious Self Harm and Deaths in Custody Policy.

Risk of Sexual Harm Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of applications that have been made for Risk of Sexual Harm Orders (RoSHO), in each of the last two years; and of these, how many were granted, broken down per court division.
(AQW 26094/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information on the number of applications for Risk of Sexual Harm Orders (RoSHO) made and orders granted in the last two years in each County Court division is given in the tables below. An interim RoSHO was granted in all cases prior to the granting of the full RoSHO order, dismissal or the withdrawal of the application.

Number of applications received for a Risk of Sexual Harm Order

County Court Division	Number of applications for a Risk of Sexual Harm Order		Number of applications resulting in a Risk of Sexual Harm Order being made	
	2011	2012	2011	2012
Londonderry	5	1	0	0
Armagh and South Down	1	1	0	1
Total	6	2	0	1

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Sexual Offences: Orders

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many successful convictions have been made under Article 64A of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

(AQW 26096/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 64A of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 was added to the statute by the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and was commenced on 1 April 2010.

The most recent year for which information on convictions is available is 2009, and therefore it is not possible to provide the answer to the question.

I have already announced my intention to bring forward legislative proposals to remove the statutory time bar for prosecutions for this offence, which currently have to be made within six months. I am proposing this change as a result of advice from the Public Prosecution Service and the PSNI, that the current time bar may be a barrier to successful prosecutions.

Police Service: Injury of Duty Awards

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice how many Police Officers are awaiting Injury of Duty Awards, and of these, how many are waiting for Medical Assessments by Blackwell Associates.

(AQW 26105/11-15)

Mr Ford: The administration of the Injury Benefit Scheme is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the independence of the Policing Board therefore you may wish to direct your question to its Chief Executive.

Courthouses: Union Flag

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice whether he is aware of any designated days when the Union Flag was not flown on all courthouses in the last twelve months.

(AQW 26185/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the last twelve months the Union flag was not flown at Newtownards Courthouse on Sunday 11 November 2012 as G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Limited (G4S), the security and ancillary services provider to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS), could not access the flagpole as contractors had inadvertently sealed a window during repairs. NICTS subsequently rectified this issue and reinstated access to the flagpole.

Also, on 6 February 2013 the Union flag was not flown at Ballymena, Enniskillen, Londonderry and Dungannon Courthouses due to an oversight by G4S. This was addressed through contract management mechanisms.

Magilligan Prison: Governor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24432/11-15, for an explanation as to the inconsistency in his answer in terms of the actions purported to have been taken by the Governor at Magilligan, which conflict with the investigation, findings and recommendations by the Prisoner Ombudsman and the subsequent response of the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 26191/11-15)

Mr Ford: The inconsistency occurred because the Governor of Magilligan Prison was not interviewed or asked to provide the information he held during the Ombudsman's investigation. As the Ombudsman was not aware of the Governing Governor's Journal entries they were not included in the findings of the investigation.

The response provided by the Director General of the Prison Service was an acknowledgement that more needs to be done to ensure staff are made fully aware of the support services available to them. The support services available to staff will be specifically mentioned in the new Serious Self Harm and Deaths in Custody Policy.

Reducing Offending in Partnership: Pilot Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, to detail the re-offending rate since following the conclusion, in September 2012, of the Reducing Offending in Partnership pilot scheme in Ballymena.

(AQW 26210/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI measured reoffending among 25 persons identified as priority offenders through Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) in Ballymena. Their offending for the period September 2011 to September 2012 was compared against their offending for the same period 2012/2013: 68% of the priority offenders showed a reduction in their offending; 28% increased their offending; and 4% showed no change.

Sexual Offences: Convictions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many successful convictions have been made under Articles 59, 60 and 61 respectively of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

(AQW 26218/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offences under Articles 59, 60 and 61 of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 came into effect on 2 February 2009. Articles 60 and 61 were subsequently amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2009. Those amendments commenced on 1 April 2010.

There were no convictions for offences under these Articles in 2009, the most recent year for which information on convictions is available.

Note:

- 1 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Nikki Toland Case

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice whether he will intervene in the case of Nikki Toland who suffers from systemic sclerosis as a result of spending time as a baby in a prison cell used in protests in Armagh Jail.

(AQW 26429/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have received no correspondence from Ms Toland on this matter.

Hydebank Wood: Strip Searching

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Criminal Justice Inspection's Reports into Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre, in particular the issue of excessive strip searching being undertaken in Ash House.

(AQW 26550/11-15)

Mr Ford: Women in Ash House are not routinely subject to full strip searching arrangements. This measure is only adopted in individual cases, and in response to specific intelligence which indicates that these procedures should be adopted. Such action has only taken place on a limited number of occasions over the course of the present year.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015. The senior management team has set out a clear direction of travel for the Prison Service based on the 40 recommendations of the Prison Review Team Report. To date nine of these have been fully implemented, with the remaining recommendations due to be completed at various stages over the next 18 months. I am satisfied that this is on track. The inspection at Hydebank Wood was carried out less than a year into this reform programme. Since then a new Director of Offender Policy and Operations has been appointed, and last month the first Director of Rehabilitation for the Northern Ireland Prison Service took up his post.

At the time of the inspection there was no permanent occupancy of either the post of Governor or Deputy Governor at Hydebank Wood. These posts have now been filled and a new senior management team is in place at the establishment.

I am confident that the senior administration of the Prison Service, together with both established members of staff and those individuals who have recently joined, will collectively bring about the change necessary to move the Service forward.

Prison Service: Recruits

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice to detail the training arrangements for new recruits to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 26559/11-15)

Mr Ford: Custody Prison Officers are required to gain an accredited Certificate of Competence within two years of appointment.

On entering the Northern Ireland Prison Service, new recruits complete an intensive eight week induction training programme at the Prison Service College. This is followed by a further two weeks Establishment familiarisation. New recruits then begin their permanent posting where they complete a further phase of development which includes completion of a portfolio of learning, directed learning booklet, assignment and assessments before being considered for the Certificate of Competence.

Hydebank Wood: CJI Report

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the performance of the senior administration of the Northern Ireland Prison Service following the significant concerns that the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland outlined in two reports into Ash House and the Young Offenders Centre at Hydebank Wood Prison.

(AQW 26572/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015. The senior management team has set out a clear direction of travel for the Prison Service based on the 40 recommendations of the Prison Review Team Report. To date nine of these have been fully implemented, with the remaining recommendations due to be completed at various stages over the next 18 months. I am satisfied that this is on track. The inspection at Hydebank Wood was carried out less than a year into this reform programme. Since then a new Director of Offender Policy and Operations has been appointed, and last month the first Director of Rehabilitation for the Northern Ireland Prison Service took up his post.

At the time of the inspection there was no permanent occupancy of either the post of Governor or Deputy Governor at Hydebank Wood. These posts have now been filled and a new senior management team is in place at the establishment.

I am confident that the senior administration of the Prison Service, together with both established members of staff and those individuals who have recently joined, will collectively bring about the change necessary to move the Service forward.

Department for Regional Development

Bus Services: WiFi

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to extend WiFi provision to all buses.
(AQW 25319/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): WiFi is currently available on all rail services and Goldline coach services. These are generally longer journeys where the use of WiFi is most in demand, of practical use and passenger numbers per vehicle are high. Translink have advised it has no existing plans at present to extend Wi-Fi provision to other bus services, such as Metro in Belfast, where the journey are generally significantly shorter.

Northern Ireland Railways: Subsidy

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development the detail the cost of the subsidy provided to Northern Ireland Railways, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 25321/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The cost of the subsidy provided to Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) is measured in terms of the amount of Public Service Obligation (PSO) that has been paid. PSO is the grant that is provided to NIR by the Department to enable it to fully discharge its obligations in respect of the provision of a Public Transport Railway Service on the Northern Ireland rail network. The figures for PSO do not provide for depreciation of assets. Virtually all assets in NIR have been funded by the Department and the accounting treatment reflects this.

The amount of PSO that has been paid to NIR in each of the last five years is provided in the table below. Passenger journeys are also included: -

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
PSO	£21.2m	£23.0m	£21.7m	£23.9m	£24.3m
Passenger Journeys	10.2m	10.0m	10.4m	10.7m	11.5m
Total services	110,929	110,040	110,262	109,867	112,859

Road Safety: Cyclists

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has had any discussions with cycling clubs regarding the use of public highways and road safety.
(AQW 25392/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service Road Safety Policy Manager has had frequent meetings with representatives from Cycling Touring Clubs and Sustrans on road safety and 20 mph speed limit issues. That official also meets with cycling

representatives at meetings of the Road Safety Forum which was established 2 years ago by the DOE Minister. This forum still meets twice a year.

Traffic Calming: Seapark Road, Hollywood

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to Seapark Road, Hollywood, whether consideration has been given to (i) installing speed bumps; and (ii) placing parking restrictions on one side of the road, to prevent the road being reduced to single lane traffic at busy periods.

(AQW 25512/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department carried out a traffic survey and assessment of the traffic calming measures at Seapark Road, Hollywood in late 2010.

Officials subsequently reviewed their assessment recently, taking account of factors such as the speed and volume of traffic; the most recent three year personal injury collision statistics; and environmental factors, such as the presence of schools, playgrounds, hospitals, clinics, shops, and public buildings.

The outcome of this review, when compared against other similar requests, was that there are a number of other areas competing for inclusion within the traffic calming programme, deemed to be of greater priority.

With regard to waiting restrictions, officials recently assessed the need for additional restrictions within Seapark Road and provided a section of double yellow lines along both sides of the road, in the vicinity of the railway bridge.

Road Safety: Cyclists

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to address the rise in cyclists killed or seriously injured.

(AQW 25536/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to providing safer roads for vulnerable road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, by utilising a range of measures, such as road safety engineering, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network. Particular measures such as dedicated cycle lanes, toucan crossings and advance stop lines at traffic signal controlled junctions are widely used to help improve safety for cyclists.

My Department also works closely with the Department of the Environment and the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the promotion of Road Safety to all road users through its Travelwise initiative. This initiative aims to increase the number of commuters who choose to cycle to work, and as part of its promotion of cycling, encourages all road users to consider the needs and safety of others.

In addition, my Department has issued a leaflet entitled 'Sharing Space on the Road' to encourage safe behaviour among road users. The leaflet sets out tips for motorists and cyclists on sharing the roads with others. The leaflet was distributed to 120,000 motorists with motor tax renewal forms in March 2012 and has been made available at various government and local government locations, as well as cycling outlets. A copy of the leaflet can be found online at http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sharing_space_on_the_road.pdf or can be obtained from Travelwise NI (telephone 0845 378 0908).

These measures demonstrate my Department's commitment to cycling through engineering, education and consultation with other external bodies.

As the Member will be aware, I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

Cycling

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department estimates future levels of bicycle use when predicting spending on roads.

(AQW 25544/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's objectives for future cycle use are set out in the Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland. The specific long-term objectives for cycling are to:

- increase the average distance cycled to be in line with our UK counterparts by 2020; and
- increase the percentage of trips taken by cycling to be in line with our UK counterparts.

The allocation of funds to cycling is tailored to meet these objectives.

Detailed budgets have yet to be agreed for future years and so it is not possible to predict spend.

I am, however, fully committed to these objectives, and cycling and pedestrian schemes will continue to be identified. It is my intention to invest in and improve the cycling infrastructure as far as available resources permit.

As the Member will be aware, I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

Roads: Infrastructure

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much money is required to bring all road infrastructure up to the required standard.

(AQW 25605/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It has been independently established that some £129 million, at 2013 prices, is needed annually to maintain the road network in its current condition. If this level of funding is not met in full, expenditure on less cost effective reactive patching will continue to increase and road conditions will continue to deteriorate.

It should be noted that the majority of the motorway network and some of the trunk road network is maintained by private companies and, as a result, the figure quoted above does not include maintenance of that part of the network.

Underinvestment during previous spending periods has had a negative effect because as pavements deteriorate through a lack of planned maintenance, they require in relative terms more expensive patching to avoid public liability claims and maintain road safety, which draws further funds away from better value resurfacing and surface dressing. As a result of the historic period of underinvestment, the maintenance backlog exceeded £850 million in 2012.

Connswater Community Greenway Project

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to Phase 2 of the Connswater Community Greenway Project, to detail (i) the support his Department is providing to the design team; and (ii) the financial contribution his Department is making to the provision of additional crossings and upgrades.

(AQW 25648/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department liaises with the Connswater Community Greenway team where their works interface with the public road. Officials have provided design details of an indicative improved layout for the A55 Upper Knockbreda Road/ Cregagh Road junction, which seeks to better cater for pedestrians and cyclists. As my Department is not taking this scheme forward, there is no financial contribution towards the provision of additional crossings and upgrades.

Cycling: Get Britain Cycling Report

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the Get Britain Cycling Report which recommends that a minimum of £10 per head is spent annually by the Government on cycling.

(AQW 25650/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am committed to promoting and supporting safer cycling for cyclists of all ages. There have been significant developments in the provision of cycling facilities across Northern Ireland and this report and any reports from the NI Assembly will be important context. At the beginning of August I published an Action Plan for Active Travel that will take forward the proposals of the Active Travel Strategy which I launched in January of this year. It brings together walking and cycling initiatives to be delivered by Government Departments, local authorities and interested stakeholders during the period 2012-2015.

I have asked my officials to ensure that there is a greater focus and priority on measures to assist cyclists in future and am establishing a cycling unit in my Department to ensure that this is achieved. I also intend to bid for additional in-year funding for cycling infrastructure, when opportunities arise.

As part of the New Approach to Regional Transportation my Department is currently developing transport spending proposals which will feed into the next Programme for Government budget process. This is being undertaken through a policy fit process which will identify those transport schemes which will best achieve the strategic objectives of the Northern Ireland Executive. This will be a mechanism for assessing how much is to be spent going forward.

Cycling Initiatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to increase spending on cycling initiatives.

(AQW 25651/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have asked my officials to ensure that there is a greater focus and priority on measures to assist cyclists in the future and am establishing a cycling unit in my Department to ensure that this is achieved. I also intend to bid for additional in-year funding for cycling infrastructure, when opportunities arise.

As part of the New Approach to Regional Transportation my Department is currently developing transport spending proposals which will feed into the next Programme for Government budget. This is being undertaken through a policy fit process which will identify those transport schemes which will best achieve the strategic objectives of the Northern Ireland Executive. As such future budgets for transport initiatives have yet to be agreed for the forthcoming years.

My Department is providing £4.3m to fund active travel Demonstration projects in Belfast, Londonderry, Craigavon and Strabane. I have also more recently committed £50k for my Department to undertake a Feasibility Study into a cycle / pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan close to the gasworks site. Furthermore, my Department's Roads Service plans to implement around 4.5km of new cycle lanes.

A26: Local Businesses

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what infrastructure will be put in place to assist local businesses along the proposed A26.

(AQW 25673/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The A26 Dualling scheme would provide an all-purpose dual carriageway between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road Junction. This will ensure significant improvements in journey times for users of this route and thus promote economic development through the improved road connections between Belfast and the North coast.

The junction strategy for the proposed scheme has rationalised the number of direct accesses onto the route, making it more appropriate for a dual carriageway. To maximise road safety, there will be no at-grade cross-over facilities along the scheme. A central reserve with safety barrier will run along its full length.

Access onto the dual carriageway, for businesses and other landowners along the scheme, will either be from left in – left out junctions or one of the adjacent full movement side road junctions. This provides a balance between the local diversions, the improved safety and good economic performance, linked to the proposed scheme.

The full movement junctions will be in the form of three compact grade separated junctions located at the B64 Glarryford junction, the C61 Lisnasoo Road junction and the B94 Drumadoon Road. There will also be one roundabout at the end of the scheme, at the A44 Drones Road junction.

A26: Spend

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount spent to date on the preparation of the A26.

(AQW 25674/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At the end of August 2013, my Department had spent £2.94m on the preparation of the A26 Dualling scheme – Glarryford to A44 (Drones Road) Junction.

Roads: Unadopted Roads in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of roads awaiting adoption by his Department in new housing developments in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) Moyle.

(AQW 25676/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number roads awaiting adoption in housing developments in the Council areas requested are set out in the table below:

Council Area	Number of Roads Awaiting Adoption
Ballymena	41
Ballymoney	14
Moyle	17

Road Safety: Cycling Strategy

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to produce a cycle safety strategy.

(AQW 25680/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Road Safety is primarily a matter for the Department of the Environment and that Department already has a Road Safety Strategy, which includes issues relating to cycling. My Department works closely with the Department of the Environment on matters of road safety, including in the Delivery Board for the Road Safety Strategy and on a number of joint activities such as the development of the Cycling Skills and Cycling Safety leaflet.

I am, however, aware that cyclists are particularly vulnerable road users and that their safety needs to be treated as a high priority. I am also aware that the perception of danger is a key factor that discourages greater use of cycling, as a mode of transport. I have therefore asked my officials to ensure the new cycling unit, which is being established in my Department, ensures greater priority and increased focus is given to safety issues, relating to cycling.

NW 200 and Ulster GP

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has consulted with the Manx Government in regard to best practice for the development of the NW 200 and Ulster GP road races; and if his proposals for flexible road closure will be in place for 2014.

(AQW 25685/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The development of the North West 200 or the Ulster Grand Prix motor cycle races is a sporting matter and responsibility would lie with the Minister for Culture Arts and Leisure. My responsibility is to facilitate those races by ensuring road closure orders are in place.

A Bill to introduce more flexibility into road racing arrangements is presently the subject of consultation. On the assumption that it will receive broad support, I intend to seek the agreement of the House for it to proceed by accelerated passage through its Assembly stages. If accelerated passage is granted, I am confident the new procedures will be in place for the 2014 racing season.

NI Water: Treatment Plant at Clay Lake

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the new Water Treatment Plant at Clay Lake, South Armagh (i) to detail the cost to construct the plant; (ii) how long the site has been in operation; and (iii) for his assessment of the effectiveness of the site.

(AQW 25694/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that (i) the construction contract for Clay Lake Water Treatment Works was awarded to Lagan Enpure Joint Venture at a cost of £2.7 million. (ii) The Works became operational on 7 August 2013 and is due for completion in October 2013. Following completion, a formal 30 day testing period will take place before the Works transfers from the contractor to NIW. (iii) The Works is operating satisfactorily and complies with the statutory drinking water quality standards.

NI Water: Treatment Plant at Clay Lake

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether all pressurized water tanks at Clay Lake Water Treatment site, South Armagh, require certification prior to usage; and if so, if all certificates are in place.

(AQW 25695/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it was necessary to obtain certification for all pressurised water tanks at Clay Lake Water Treatment Works. All pressurised water tanks at the Works were inspected prior to use and appropriate certificates are in place.

Cycling: Training for Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he or his officials have had discussions with the Department of Education regarding cycle training for all primary and secondary school-age pupils.

(AQW 25714/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Responsibility for the provision of Cycling Proficiency Training rests with the Department of the Environment Road Safety Branch as part of its statutory duty to road safety, to give children the basic skills and confidence to cycle safely.

Neither I nor my officials have had discussions with the Department of Education regarding cycle training for all primary and secondary school-age pupils.

However my officials have written to that Department seeking its support to the Active School Travel programme which aims to deliver cycling and walking skills training to a limited number of schools over a three year period. The response received indicated that whilst it was supportive it was unable to actively engage in the programme.

Cycle to Work Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he is taking to encourage Departments and Local Authorities to work together to ensure that the Cycle to Work scheme assists in implementing sustainable transport objectives.

(AQW 25716/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials engage with Departments and Local Authorities to develop and implement workplace Travel Plans promoting sustainable travel and to promote cycling especially during Bike Week in June each year. The Travel Plans encourage workplaces to make the scheme available to their employees and to support them in using their cycles for the journey to work while Bike Week partnerships with Local Authorities encourage them to promote cycling to work.

I launched the Active Travel Strategy in January 2013 and I undertook then to publish an action plan which sets out measures that will be taken by government departments, local authorities and voluntary bodies to encourage more cycling and walking and less dependency on private cars. In preparing the Active travel strategy representatives from local authorities and other departments were consulted.

The Action Plan which was published at the beginning of August lists all of the initiatives planned between 2012 to 2015.

Cycling Unit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff will be employed in his Department's cycling unit.

(AQW 25753/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

At present, cycling issues are dealt with in different parts of my Department. Senior officials are now considering how the new cycling unit could ensure all cycling issues are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner and are given an increased focus and priority.

I have asked for this consideration to be completed as a matter of urgency, so I can then consider what additional staff resources need to be allocated to the new unit.

New Lamp Posts: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of providing new lamp posts in the North Down area, in the last three financial years.

(AQW 25755/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain a separate analysis of the cost of providing new lamp posts in the North Down area, however, it does maintain analysis of Capital Street Lighting spend which includes the provision of new lanterns, lamp posts and cabling. This expenditure is recorded by District Council area and not by Constituency area.

Details of expenditure of this type in the North Down Council Area during the last three years, are set out in the table below:

Council Area	Spend £k		
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
North Down	91	433	12

However, it should be noted that whilst the actual spend on Capital Street Lighting may be within one district council area, the benefits are not confined to the district council in which the work was completed.

Additional detail on specific schemes progressed in the North Down area, over the past three years, can be viewed in Council Reports for North Down which are available on my Department's website. Details of the relevant links are included for your convenience:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8946

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8202

Cycling: Additional Investment

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans following the recent announcement by H.M. Government on additional investment for cycling.

(AQW 25791/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have recently directed the establishment of a Cycle Policy Unit, in my Department, tasked with better co-ordinating all cycle issues and working with other interested stakeholders to develop robust and sustainable strategies.

During the incoming year, my Department is providing £4.3m to fund active travel Demonstration projects in Belfast, Londonderry, Craigavon and Strabane. I have also more recently committed £50k for my Department to undertake a Feasibility Study into a cycle / pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan close to the gasworks site. Furthermore, my Department's Roads Service plans to implement around 4.5km of new cycle lanes.

Another very recent initiative is The Active School Travel Programme which will provide a programme of cycle and walking skills training to pupils in 60 schools across Northern Ireland over a three year period. The objective of this programme is to encourage school pupils to adopt cycling and walking as their main mode of transport to and from school. We may need to support this programme with investment in infrastructure (often safety measures at schools) to encourage participation. I aim to bid for £2m in October Monitoring to kick start this programme and I am keen to develop a long term marketing campaign to develop behavioural change.

Cycling Initiatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any new departmental initiatives to encourage cycling.

(AQW 25793/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Action Plan for Active Travel which I published at the beginning of August lists many new cycling initiatives to be delivered by Government Departments including my Department, local authorities and interested stakeholders during the period 2012 -2015.

Another very recent initiative undertaken by my Department is The Active School Travel Programme. This will provide a programme of cycle and walking skills training to pupils in 180 schools across Northern Ireland over a three year period. The objective of this programme is to encourage school pupils to adopt cycling and walking as their main mode of transport to and from school.

I have established a new cycling unit within my Department, which will be tasked to identify and suggest possible new cycling infrastructure schemes along with supporting cycling events to complement the existing National Cycle Network in line with the Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy.

Cycling Initiatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to increase spending on cycling initiatives, shown as a proportion of total departmental spend.

(AQW 25794/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Budgets have yet to be agreed for future years and as such it is not possible to predict spend as a proportion to total departmental spend. My Department is providing £4.3m to fund active travel demonstration projects in Belfast, Londonderry, Craigavon and Strabane. I have also more recently committed £50k for my Department to undertake a Feasibility Study into a cycle / pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan.

I have asked my officials to ensure that there is a greater focus and priority on measures to assist cyclists in the future and am establishing a cycling unit in my Department to ensure that this is achieved. I also intend to bid for additional in-year funding for cycling infrastructure, when opportunities arise.

As part of the New Approach to Regional Transportation my Department is currently developing transport spending proposals which will feed into the next Programme for Government budget. This is being undertaken through a policy fit process which will identify those transport schemes which will best achieve the strategic objectives of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Car Parking: Holywood and Bangor Residents

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update in the provision of Residents Parking Permits in (i) Holywood; and (ii) Bangor town centres.

(AQW 25795/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials are working towards the introduction of residents' parking schemes within all areas of parking restraint identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP). They are presently concentrating their efforts on schemes in inner Belfast and it is hoped that, in due course, residents' parking schemes could also be progressed in Bangor, Carrickfergus and Lisburn. The timing of schemes outside Belfast will be dependent upon the progress of those being developed at present and a future prioritisation of remaining areas.

Although Holywood is not specifically identified within the BMTP in this respect, a number of requests have been received for the provision of residents' parking in residential areas of the town centre, including Spencer Street. Accordingly, my officials have added these locations to its list of areas for future consideration, once all the areas identified within the BMTP have been addressed.

NI Water: Silent Valley Reservoir

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development why events organised by Northern Ireland Water at the Silent Valley Reservoir, Kilkeel, always take place on a Sunday.

(AQW 25797/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that events held at the Silent Valley do not always take place on a Sunday.

A wide variety of events have been held at Silent Valley on days other than a Sunday, including a highly successful concert on Friday 21 June this year and partner events such as the Great Outdoors Weekend run in conjunction with RSPB held on Saturday 21 September. In addition, a range of educational visits and community group visits take place on various days of the week.

Cycle Lane: Tillysburn to Holywood Exchange

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to complete the cycle lane between Tillysburn Roundabout and Holywood Exchange on the seaward side of the road.

(AQW 25810/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member there are cycle facilities along the A2 between Tillysburn Roundabout and the start of the slip road that leads to Holywood Exchange, although there are breaks in current provision for both pedestrians and cyclists along the full route to Holywood Exchange.

I have asked my officials to investigate the feasibility of providing a complete link for pedestrians and cyclists to Holywood Exchange.

A2: Progress

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update in the progress of the A2.

(AQW 25812/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member work is now well underway on the A2 Shore Road scheme at Greenisland. The contract is approximately 30 weeks into a very tight 120 week programme which involves upgrading, to dual carriageway standard, some 3.5 kilometres of the A2 between Jordanstown Road and Seapark. Improvements will also include four new roundabouts at Shore Avenue; Shorelands; Station Road, Greenisland; and Seapark.

I visited the site on 29 August 2013 and I was very impressed with the progress to date. The site has been cleared, excavation of earthworks carried out and construction of accommodation works is ongoing at many adjacent properties. An extensive programme of works within the Belfast High School grounds was completed within their summer holiday periods. Works were also carried out at the University of Ulster access during this period.

Traffic management from the outset has been extremely well planned and co-ordinated. Both the Contractor, Graham Construction, and my Department have received complimentary correspondence from both residents and road users.

The scheme is on schedule for completion in summer 2015.

Railways: Network Upgrade

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of upgrading the railway network, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 25927/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the cost of upgrading the railway network in each of the last three financial years.

2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
£18,204,147	£36,590,478	£38,883,245

The figures include: Platform Extensions; track safety improvements; safety and compliance work; and station improvements.

Translink: Bus Drivers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many bus drivers are employed by Translink.

(AQW 25931/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following table provides the information requested which has been provided by Translink.

Total number of full-time bus drivers (36 hours)	1,513
Total number of part-time bus drivers (less than 36 hours)	244
Grand total number of bus drivers	1,757

Road Safety: Cyclists

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps are being taken to improve road safety for cyclists.

(AQW 25942/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to providing safer roads for vulnerable road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, by utilising a range of measures, such as road safety engineering, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network. Particular measures such as dedicated cycle lanes, toucan crossings and advance stop lines at traffic signal controlled junctions are widely used to help improve safety for cyclists.

My Department also works closely with the Department of the Environment and the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the promotion of Road Safety to all road users through its Travelwise initiative. This initiative aims to increase the number of commuters who choose to cycle to work, and as part of its promotion of cycling, encourages all road users to consider the needs and safety of others.

In addition, my Department has issued a leaflet entitled 'Sharing Space on the Road' to encourage safe behaviour among road users. The leaflet sets out tips for motorists and cyclists on sharing the roads with others. The leaflet was distributed to 120,000 motorists with motor tax renewal forms in March 2012 and has been made available at various government and local government locations, as well as cycling outlets. A copy of the leaflet can be found online at http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sharing_space_on_the_road.pdf or can be obtained from Travelwise NI (telephone 0845 378 0908).

These measures demonstrate my Department's commitment to cycling through engineering, education and consultation with other external bodies.

In addition, I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

DRD: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 25962/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Since 2007 there have been one hundred and forty six North South Ministerial Council meetings, including twelve in Plenary and seven in Institutional format, which have been attended by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

There have been twenty eight meetings under the aegis of the British Irish Council attended by Ministers, including twelve at Summit level.

We do not collate information on other bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC involving individual Ministers or officials.

Cycle/Pedestrian Footbridge: River Lagan

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development when the feasibility study for a cycle/pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan, close to the Gasworks site, will be completed.

(AQW 25970/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The feasibility study for a cycle/pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan will be completed in mid-February 2014.

Roads: Road Surety Bonds for Residential Developments in East Antrim

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the residential developments in East Antrim that have a road surety bond; and how long each bond has been outstanding.

(AQW 25973/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of bonds held for residential developments in East Antrim and the length of time the agreement has been in place are set out in the following table:

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)
Beechwood Avenue, Newtownabbey	01/Nov/2012	1
Beechwood Avenue, Newtownabbey	07/Nov/2012	1
Brackenridge, Sloefield Road, Carrickfergus	21/Sep/2001	12
Bridewell Drive, Carrickfergus	29/Oct/2004	9
Brooklands Gardens, Carrickfergus	22/Mar/2005	8
Cambridge Close, Carrickfergus	27/Aug/1996	17
Circular Road, Jordanstown	10/Aug/2006	7
Craiglands, Carrickfergus	12/Mar/1997	16
Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus	04/Apr/2012	1
Farm Lodge Park, Greenisland	02/Apr/2012	1
Farm Lodge, Greenisland	04/Jul/2000	13
Farm Lodge, Greenisland	06/Feb/2006	7
Glenavna, Shore Road, Newtownabbey	10/Sep/2009	4
Glenavna, Shore Road, Newtownabbey	06/Sep/2013	0
Glenisland Terrace, Greenisland	31/Oct/2011	2
Glenview Park, Newtownabbey	09/Oct/2002	11
Glenview Park, Newtownabbey	19/Jan/2009	4
Glenville Road, Newtownabbey	14/May/2008	5
Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey	14/Jun/2010	3
Larne Road, Carrickfergus	07/Sep/2009	4
Larne Road, Carrickfergus	17/Dec/2009	4

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)
Longpark, Farm Lodge, Greenisland	06/Feb/2006	7
Loughshore Courtyard, Shore Road, Jordanstown	04/Jan/2011	2
Meadowbank Farm, Jordanstown	09/Mar/2007	6
Mountpleasant View Mountpleasant Road, Jordanstown	14/Jun/2010	3
North Lodge Court, Carrickfergus	11/Mar/2002	11
Old Shore Court, Carrickfergus	22/Aug/2005	8
Rhanbuoy Close, Carrickfergus	21/Feb/2013	0
Riverbrook, Brooklands Drive, Carrickfergus	10/Jun/1998	5
Riverforde, Slaughterford Road, Whitehead	02/Mar/2005	8
Riverforde, Slaughterford Road, Whitehead	02/Aug/2006	7
Shorelands, Shore Road, Greenisland	20/Jan/2011	2
Shorelands, Shore Road, Greenisland	25/Jan/2013	0
The Cairns, Upper Station Road, Greenisland	13/Jan/2012	1
Thralcot Link, Carrickfergus	22/Feb/2013	0
Trailcock Road, Carrickfergus	02/Apr/2012	1
Trailcock Road, Carrickfergus	15/May/2013	0
Tudor Road, Carrickfergus	22/Jan/2013	0
Upper Road, Greenisland	13/Nov/2007	6
Windmill Park, Carrickfergus	23/Nov/2011	2
Whinfield, Larne	27/Apr/1990	23
Whinfield, Larne	04/Feb/1997	16
Inver Heights, Larne	29/Oct/1991	22
Inver Heights, Larne	18/Sep/1992	21
Oakdene, Larne	03/Sep/2007	6
Ballyloran Manor, Larne	11/Sep/2000	13
Hampton Manor, Larne	04/Oct/2002	11
Lindara, Larne	14/Dec/2001	12
Lindara, Larne	14/Aug/2003	10
Lindara, Larne	17/Nov/2004	9
Lindara, Larne	27/Apr/2006	7
Lindara, Larne	27/Apr/2006	7
Lindara, Larne	27/Apr/2006	7
Lindara, Larne	24/Jan/2007	6
Lindara, Larne	28/Nov/2007	6
Lindara, Larne	28/Nov/2007	6
Lindara, Larne	28/Nov/2007	6
Lindara, Larne	12/Apr/2002	11
Mullaghboy Heights, Islandmagee	03/Oct/2007	6
Mullaghboy Heights, Islandmagee	27/Jan/2010	3
Drumahoe Manor, Larne	29/Apr/2004	9
Drumahoe Manor, Larne	10/Aug/2006	7

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)
Leafield, Ballycarry	14/Aug/2006	7
Leafield, Ballycarry	12/Aug/2010	3
Bayfields, Carnlough	02/Nov/2006	7
Bayfields, Carnlough	10/May/2007	6
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	08/Sep/2005	8
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	27/Sep/2005	8
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	08/Sep/2005	8
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	08/Sep/2005	8
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	22/Sep/2005	8
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	22/Sep/2005	8
The Hamptons, Larne	22/Sep/2005	8
Lislainan, Ballycarry	10/Jan/2006	7
Lislainan, Ballycarry	10/Jan/2006	7
Seven Springs, Larne	10/Jan/2006	7
Porter Green, Larne	10/Jan/2006	7
Logans Loanen, Larne	17/Oct/2006	7
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	16/Jan/2007	6
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	17/Oct/2011	2
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	02/Nov/2006	7
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	02/Nov/2006	7
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	02/Nov/2006	7
Larne West Distributor Road, Larne	23/Jan/2007	6
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	12/Aug/2013	0
Rose Place, Islandmagee	12/Aug/2013	0
Rose Place, Islandmagee	10/Sep/2009	4
Redlands Road, Larne	02/Aug/2011	2
Curran Road, Larne	26/Oct/2012	1
Curran Road, Larne	03/Mar/2010	3
Gorse Meadow, Larne	03/Mar/2010	3

Roads: Local Authority Closure

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed legislation that will allow local authorities to close roads for local events.

(AQW 25990/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 was enacted, under the previous administration, on 13 August 2010.

However, the provisions of the Act aimed specifically at restricting or prohibiting traffic from using a road for special events have yet to be commenced, and I am not minded to commence these provisions at this time. I may review the position next year.

Railways: Delays from Belfast to Londonderry and Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times have trains, which departed from Belfast, been delayed by more than ten minutes upon arrival at (i) Coleraine; and (ii) Londonderry, since the recommencement of the service in 2013.

(AQW 25998/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that Translink have confirmed since recommencement of services between Coleraine and Londonderry on 24 March 2013, the majority of services from Belfast operated via Coleraine to either Portrush or Londonderry. NI Railways only record punctuality of arrival at destination stations and therefore cannot advise punctuality of all arrivals at Coleraine, where Coleraine is en-route, i.e. not a destination station.

The table below provides detail on the number of services operated by NI Railways in the period from 24 March 2013 to 14 September 2013, along with the percentage of punctuality achieved. As shown the level punctuality achieved is well in excess of the 90% target set out in the Passenger's Charter for the Londonderry and Portrush line.

	Services	Services delayed (10 minutes) (% of all Services)	% Punctuality Achieved on all Services
Belfast-Londonderry (via Coleraine)	1,475	20 (1.36%)	98.64%
Belfast-Portrush (via Coleraine)	1,050	17 (1.62%)	98.38%
Belfast-Coleraine (terminated in Coleraine)	425	6 (1.41%)	98.59%
Total	2,950	43 (1.46%)	98.54%

Note: Trains arriving at Portrush or Londonderry 10 minutes or more late could reasonably be assumed to be 10 minutes late through Coleraine on that journey.

Transport: Severe Weather Contingency

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the contingency plans in place for severe winter weather in relation to roads and railway links.

(AQW 26010/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is well prepared for the incoming winter season and will be able to provide a high standard of service delivery for the gritting of roads.

Prior to the start of each winter service period, Roads Service carries out a significant amount of planning to ensure a state of readiness for the coming season. In addition to a number of routine pre-season checks, planning includes ensuring that adequate staffing arrangements are in place, including training for new staff, where required, and ensuring all winter service equipment is in working order. Every night, from the end of October 2013 until the middle of April 2014, Roads Service will have almost 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads, helping drivers across Northern Ireland cope with the wintry conditions. Contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

All Roads Service salt barns are at full capacity with stocks in excess of 70,000 tonnes with additional salt stock resilience held at six strategic locations totalling 38,100 tonnes. The current Winter Service salt contract also provides for the supply of a further 15,000 tonnes per month from October 2013 to April 2014, if required.

In addition, My Department has agreements in place with 24 of the 26 District Councils, to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow. I will be writing to the Chief Executives of the remaining two councils to encourage them to come on board.

Translink has provided me with the following update:

Bus Operations

- The winter preparedness action plan was re-issued on 1 October 2013 following updates in relation to winter materials stocks;
- The bus fleet winterisation programme commenced on 1 October 2013 and is planned to be completed by the end of November 2013; and
- Individual information relating to winter driving techniques for bus drivers will be issued at the same time as the winter preparedness action plan.

Rail Operations

- Additional rail staff will receive training on auxiliary competencies to deal with equipment failures during extreme weather, e.g. points and level crossings;
- Further review of previous action plan arising from previous winter preparedness report; and
- Review of cross-company weather preparedness arrangements.

Infrastructure

- Sandite teams have been mobilised to deal with difficulties associated with low rail adhesion;
- A reserve stock of salt is in place;
- Additional points heaters have been commissioned and are being rolled out across the rail network;
- Heating elements have been installed in high risk railway crossing barriers;

- All Infrastructure vans are supplied with Snow Socks to enable staff to access the network, as far as is reasonably safe/practical, in poor road conditions;
- Rail engineers and supervisors are chainsaw trained and possess the required equipment to tackle fallen trees/branches, within reason. A call-out contract for tackling larger fallen trees has been awarded; and
- Our structures maintenance contract has emergency call-out arrangements for any form of civil engineering support that may be required.

Communications

- The 'cloud-based' telephone system is in place in the Contact Centre, providing greater resilience and business continuity/disaster recovery. This also provides for access to the phone system in the event of a Contact Centre communications failure;
- A new server has been installed in the Contact Centre;
- Technical disaster recovery arrangements (with off-site back up) have been implemented for Contact Centre business applications;
- The Internet bandwidth on the main Translink website has been increased by 300%, with scope to increase further at very short notice if necessary;
- It is planned that a Contact Centre Supervisor will be on duty from 06:00 over the days when snow is forecast to 'tweet' the latest travel news;
- Passengers will be kept apprised of the latest travel news in the Europa bus centre by means of LED screens. These can be updated by Inspectors to provide real time information and white boards also available; and
- A mobile phone specific version of the website has been introduced to drive reduction in the number of 'regular' calls to Contact Centre, therefore, freeing up resources.

Roads Service: Sandbags

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has a suitable stock of sandbags available in local depots; and to detail the contact details to be used by householders, including 24 hour helplines, to access sandbags in the event of flooding or flood risk warnings.

(AQW 26011/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has suitable stocks of sandbags available in local depots to deal with inclement weather.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) also holds sufficient stocks of sandbags, which it deems necessary for the protection of locations/infrastructure falling under its statutory responsibility. These can be made available for distribution to the public, where property is in imminent danger. In addition, NIW and DARD Rivers Agency have entered into a temporary Sand Bag Protocol agreement with Belfast City Council where they will, on request, supply sandbags to the Council, who will store and distribute them when required.

During periods of inclement weather, the primary objective of Roads Service is to deal with the impact of roads related flooding that is caused by blocked or overwhelmed infrastructure, such as gullies or other road drainage systems, for which it has responsibility. Roads Service does have a sufficient supply of sandbags in store for emergency purposes and, in line with current policy, will continue to assist other agencies/bodies deal with flooding incidents. This includes the prompt deployment of sandbags, particularly in cases where properties are at risk of flooding, if requested and as resources permit.

Members of the public who have concerns about flooding should contact the Flooding Incident Line on 0300 2000 100. This service provides a single number to report serious flooding, available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Roads Service: Sandbags

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service will issue sandbags to residents who have previously experienced flooding in the event of a weather warning from the Met Office.

(AQW 26012/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: With regard to the issue of sandbags to residents who have previously experienced flooding, in the event of a weather warning, I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question, AQW 26011/11-15.

Roads: Resurfacing of Morston Avenue Area, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to resurface the roads and footpaths in the Morston Avenue area of Bangor.

(AQW 26015/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: 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 advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and so it is not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Giro d'Italia 2014

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what improvements to cycling provision he aims to have in place before the start of the Giro d'Italia 2014.

(AQW 26026/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Whilst there are no specific improvements planned for cycle provision in relation to the Giro d'Italia 2014 other than minor maintenance issues associated with the route, officials from my Department are fully engaged with officials in DETI to ensure the event is a success and its legacy will help to further promote cycling in Northern Ireland.

During 2013/14, my Department plans to provide around 4.5km of new cycle lanes.

Railways: Bicycles

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many bicycles were carried on trains, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26027/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There is no ticket issued separately for bicycles carried, therefore Translink has no data on the number of bicycles carried on trains in each of the last five years.

Translink do, however, monitor utilization of cycle parking spaces at rail stations. Translink's intention is to expand cycle storage capacity where utilization rates justify this.

Buses: Bicycles

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many bicycles were carried on buses, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26028/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that as no ticket issued for bicycles it therefore has no data on the number of bicycles carried.

Car Parking: Free Provision in Ballymoney, Ballymena and Moyle

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce additional free parking provision in council areas.

(AQW 26031/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I announced a freeze on any further increase to car parking charges in early November 2012, for the remainder of the current budget period, that is, up until 2015. This announcement also provided for a freeze on the introduction of charges in existing Roads Service operated car parks during this period.

In each of the council areas you refer to, provision has been made for free parking. This is specifically within the main towns and larger villages and is in addition to the availability of many opportunities to park on-street, where charges do not apply. In overall terms, it is considered the present mix of off-street and on-street free space availability supports commercial activity and contributes to the vitality of towns and villages.

As you are aware, a Park and Ride facility is to be provided as part of the proposed dualling of the A26, between the A44 Drone's Road and Glarryford. When provided, this car park will be free.

NI Water: Conlig Reservoir

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what the timescale is for the sale of the reservoirs at Conlig.

(AQW 26057/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my recent answer to AQW 25712/11-15.

NI Water: Portavoe Reservoir

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what the timescale is for the sale of the reservoir at Portavoe.

(AQW 26058/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Portavoe Reservoir is surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. Under NIW's licence to operate, it has a legal obligation to dispose of property no longer of use. However, there are many issues which need to be resolved before the Reservoir can be offered for sale, including ownership, council interest, private interests and the other legalities. NIW is continuing to address these issues and has assured me that all interested parties will be informed when they are resolved and before the property is offered for sale or transfer.

Roads: Speed Hump Damage

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many claims have been made against his Department for damage to cars caused by speed humps.

(AQW 26061/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of such claims, in each of the past 3 years, are set out in the table below:

Year	Claims for damage caused by speed humps on the carriageway
2010/11	4
2011/12	8
2012/13	6

Monument: Ardboe

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 24127/11-15, to detail the location of the monument that is listed as blank; and whether any writing has been added to this monument.

(AQW 26064/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The monument listed as blank was at the junction of B73 Battery Road and B161 Drumenny Road, Ardboe near Cookstown, however, I understand it has recently been removed.

NI Water: Disposal of Reservoirs

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the policy on the disposal of reservoirs.

(AQW 26065/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The disposal of assets, including reservoirs, is a matter for Northern Ireland Water, subject to the legislative and governance framework. The Company is authorised to dispose of land in accordance with the General Authorisation in respect of the Disposal of Protected Land issued by DRD in 2007 under Article 217 of the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006 (the 2006 Order). It must adhere to the requirements of that authorisation.

Northern Ireland Water is required to dispose of any assets which are no longer required by the company for the purposes of providing water and sewerage services. It must achieve best value, as set out in the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum between DRD and the Company. This reflects central, public sector guidance contained within the Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland and Managing Public Money Northern Ireland. The company must also meet the requirements of Condition K of its Instrument of Appointment (Licence) issued under the 2006 Order which sets out its obligations to report to and seek approval from the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation on matters concerning the disposal of land.

Railways: Larne Line

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of passengers using the Larne Railway Line since the introduction of the 2013 timetable compared to the comparable period under the previous timetable.

(AQW 26072/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The current railway timetable on the Larne line commenced on 24 March 2013. Translink advise 1,008,075 passenger journeys have been recorded on the Larne line from April to September 2013 compared to 849,243 in the corresponding period in 2012.

Railways: Larne Line

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development when six-carriage trains will be fully deployed on the Larne Railway Line.

(AQW 26073/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At present NI Railways regularly operate one 6-carriage train during both the morning and evening peaks on the Larne Line.

Deployment of 6-carriage trains is based on need across the network and NI Railways continue to monitor passenger loadings on all peak services.

Railways: Larne Line

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of recorded breakdowns and delays on the Larne Railway Line since the introduction of the 2013 timetable.

(AQW 26074/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has confirmed that for the Larne line over 9,600 services there were 6 breakdowns resulting in the cancellation of services and 157 delays since the introduction of the 2013 timetable.

Punctuality on the Larne Line since the introduction of the new timetable has been excellent, with 98.3% of all trains arriving at their destination within 5 minutes of their scheduled arrival time. This is above the Passenger Charter standards agreed with the Department and Consumer Council.

Railways: Ballycarry Station

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans Translink have to provide a park and ride facility, including safe pick-up and drop-off facilities, at Ballycarry Railway Station,
(AQW 26076/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Railways have no current plans to develop a Park and Ride facility at Ballycarry. Translink have been liaising with Road Services in respect of traffic management and pedestrian access issues at Ballycarry.

Railways: Passenger Complaints

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department addresses complaints concerning delays caused by train or railway line defects.
(AQW 26150/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is responsible for operational matters such as delays caused by train or railway line defects. In the event of a complaint being received by the Department on such a matter it is immediately passed on to senior Translink officials asking them to respond directly to the complainant while copying me into their reply. Clearly my Department monitors relevant performance measures. The Translink Passenger Charter, drawn up in consultation with the Consumer Council and my Department, sets reliability and punctuality targets which are independently monitored and the results published twice a year.

Translink has in place a Complaint Handling Policy whereby complaints are consistently handled as detailed in the Passenger's Charter.

If a rail service is delayed or cancelled for any reason within NI Railways control, a passenger may be entitled to compensation vouchers, or a refund based on the fare paid. Detailed information pertaining to Translink's Delay-Repay Compensation Scheme can be accessed on the Translink website at:

<http://www.translink.co.uk/Corporate/About-Us/Publications/Delay-Repay-Compensation-Scheme/>

Transport: Disability Action Scheme

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the interim Disability Action Transport Scheme; and to outline the plans for this scheme.
(AQW 26151/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Disability Action continues to provide Disability Action Transport Services, on an interim basis, in partnership with a number of other voluntary and community organisations in 29 urban areas across Northern Ireland. For the period 01 April 2013 to 31 August 2013, there have been in excess of 54,000 passenger trips delivered. Disability Action has also recently procured a number of new modern vehicles and will soon establish a user forum where users will have an active role to ensure their views about the service are taken on board.

Going forward the Department has established a project to identify and deliver a long term replacement for the Door-2-Door scheme which ended on 31 March 2013. The first part of this project is to undertake an evaluation of the policy and associated schemes initiated by the Department to promote social inclusion.

The outcome of the evaluation will assist the Department to better understand the barriers to the use of public transport and to identify what measures can be taken to overcome these barriers. This will also enable the Department to develop a detailed programme for the delivery of a transport scheme to replace Door-2-Door.

Rathlin Island: Ferry Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Rathlin Ferry contract.
(AQW 26258/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Rathlin Ferry contract continues to operate. The current contract ends on 30 June 2014 and the Department are currently considering the options to ensure a continued service from 1 July 2014.

Rathlin Island: Ferry Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the passenger numbers for the Rathlin Ferry service in each of the last three years.
(AQW 26259/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The service provider records the number of passenger journeys and not the actual number of passengers. The table below details the passenger journeys for the Rathlin Ferry service in each of the last three calendar years from 2010. Passenger journeys to the end of September 2013 are 74,003. This is a 10% increase on the equivalent figure at the end of September 2012.

Year	Passenger journeys
2010	85,889
2011	79,623
2012	74,225

Railways: Halts and Stations

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered displaying up to date ticket fares at train halts and stations.

(AQW 26311/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me rail fares are available on their website, www.translink.co.uk, and its Contact Centre staff can also provide information on all fares.

With the increasing use of smart devices by passengers focus has been geared to providing fare information by these means.

To publish all possible fares at stations and halts would not be practical, however, Translink do from time to time advertise promotional fares at stations and elsewhere around the network.

Buses: Bicycle Racks

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 26029/11-15, when Translink will be able to provide bicycle racks on either the inside or the exterior of a bus.

(AQW 26367/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised my officials that it has investigated the suitability of exterior mounted cycle racks as used by bus operators in North America and Canada. However most buses in Translink have larger windscreens and tests showed that the cycle racks obscured vision for the driver. Translink deemed this to be an unacceptable safety risk. Rear-mounted cycle rack appliances would also present a safety risk, due to their restricting access to the engine compartment.

In relation to the interior of the buses, Translink endeavour to keep as much of the unseated area of the bus as possible free for wheelchairs and mobility equipment and for families travelling with young children. Relinquishing this space to the disadvantage of these passenger groups is not, in Translink's opinion, the best use of the space.

Translink is aware of the need to provide space for bicycles on its vehicles. I have asked it to explore options going forward taking account of value for money, safety and impact on its overall passenger base.

Railways: Antrim Passengers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the number of rail passengers using Antrim station.

(AQO 4665/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: When I came to office passenger flows at Antrim Railway station were almost 279,000 per annum. This had increased by 24,000 by the end of March 2013. So far this year passenger flow is up a further 36% on the same period last year.

Park and Ride: Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the extension of the park and ride facility at Ballymoney Railway Station.

(AQO 4662/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In November 2012, I officially opened the extended Park and Ride facilities at Ballymoney Railway station. Translink had enhanced the car parking provision at the station from 27 spaces to 59 spaces at that time.

Translink's current project to extend Park & Ride facilities at this station aims to provide up to 46 additional spaces. This will increase it to 105 spaces. It is subject to the completion of an Economic Appraisal and the necessary Departmental approval. The estimated completion date for the project is the end of 2014/15.

Roads: Winter Weather

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department plans to deal with any adverse weather conditions this winter.

(AQO 4669/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is well prepared for the coming winter. Staffing arrangements are being finalised, pre-season checks on winter service equipment are complete and salt stocks have been replenished. From the end of October, Roads Service will have over 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads. Contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

Following the two snow events last winter, I commissioned an independent review of the performance of Roads Service over the period. The National Winter Service Research Group carried out a comprehensive review, examining every aspect of the winter service programme. The outcome of the review was positive and concluded that our winter service policies were well-considered and consistent. I am still considering the report and will place a copy in the Assembly Library.

One of the key recommendations from the review was that the winter service fleet replacement programme continues to be prioritised in order to reduce the unreliability of gritters and other equipment. I am committed to investing in the winter service fleet and to that end, will continue to seek funding to ensure the fleet we have is fit for purpose and capable of dealing with the long winter period. I hope Members will support bids for this additional funding.

A further recommendation highlighted the need for consistency of service in relation to the salting of footways. My Department has agreements with 24 of the 26 District Councils to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow. I propose to write to the Chief Executives of the remaining two councils to encourage them to come on board.

Northern Ireland Water will continue with the range of measures within the Winter Contingency Plan, in order that it can be well placed to respond to anticipated increases in burst mains, corresponding loss of supply and increased demand in the weeks ahead and the remainder of the winter.

Roads: Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the Armagh West and East Link Roads, including when he intends to announce a preferred route for the two projects.

(AQO 4670/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Selection of the preferred alignment and junction options for the Armagh East Link proposal was completed after an assessment of several corridor options. This "Preferred Line", which reflects the corridor indicated in the Armagh Area Plan 2004, was announced at a public exhibition in Armagh in March 2007. An information event to bring the public up to date with the proposals will take place next year.

The projected length of the proposed new road is approximately 2.5 kilometres, between the A28 Markethill Road and the A3 Portadown Road, around the eastern outskirts of the City of Armagh. The cost of the A28 East Link is estimated to be in the range £12 to £20 million.

With regard to the Armagh North and West Link, consideration of options for a preferred line and junction strategy based on the 'out of town' corridor, published in July 2008, is continuing. There have been ongoing discussions with elected representatives and Armagh City and District Council. This consultation has included an initial meeting with Deloitte, who have been appointed by Armagh City and District Council to develop a Masterplan for the Mullinure Area. It would not be appropriate to make a decision on the preferred route, pending development of the Masterplan. This corridor extends approximately 6.9 kilometres around the Western and Northern outskirts of Armagh City, from the A3 Monaghan Road on the south western outskirts of the city to the A3 Portadown Road, north east of the city. The current estimate for the cost of this scheme is in the range £55 to £75 million.

In common with other Strategic Road Improvement schemes, progress of the design and development of these schemes will be dependent upon the completion of the statutory procedures, the scheme having a satisfactory economic appraisal and the availability of funding in future budget settlements.

A1

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed closure of all right turns on the A1 from Hillsborough to Newry, including the construction of four new grade separated junctions as replacements.

(AQO 4671/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Work on the closure of right turns on the A1 between Hillsborough and Loughbrickland is currently being progressed and it is anticipated a preferred option will be identified by Spring 2014.

This scheme involves the construction of four new grade separated junctions and a new northbound on-slip at Castlewellan Road, Banbridge. It also includes the installation of a continuous central safety barrier between Hillsborough Roundabout and Loughbrickland.

Following completion of this scheme, the only stretch on the A1 where right turning manoeuvres will still be permitted (side roads only) will be between Loughbrickland and Beech Hill.

As funding becomes available, consideration will be given to further junction upgrades and the provision of associated continuous safety barrier along this stretch of the A1.

Blue Badge: Delay in Renewals

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to address the delay in the renewals process for the Blue Badge Scheme.

(AQO 4672/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has a target to inform 95% of applicants for Blue Badges of our decision within 15 working days of receipt of their valid applications. Given that in excess of 35,000 applications are received each year, this is a challenging target.

As of 29 August 2013, there were approximately 3500 Blue Badge applications waiting to be processed. The Blue Badge Unit is currently working approximately six to seven days behind the 15-day target due to a number of short-term resourcing issues that are being addressed. Two additional posts in the unit were created earlier in the year following a review of workloads. Pending recruitment of permanent staff, casual staff have been employed and weekend overtime arranged to address the backlog. Until the unit is up to full complement, it is expected that delays may persist during September. Departmental staff are working to fill all vacancies as soon as possible.

I have instructed officials to extend the grace period for expired Blue Badges to one calendar month. This is in line with car tax expiry dates.

Drumclay Crannog

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will contribute funding to take forward the post excavation work in relation to the Drumclay crannog in County Fermanagh.

(AQO 4673/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will recall that prior to his standing down as Minister for the Environment in July 2013, he wrote to me seeking confirmation regarding the funding my Department will be contributing to the post-excavation work associated with Drumclay crannog. I responded to your successor, Minister Durkan, and can confirm, in line with the levels of costs as indicated by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) officials during the excavation period, that my Department has committed to contributing a total of £500,000 towards the post-excavation process across three years, including this current financial year.

I am aware the NIEA is considering expanding the post-excavation process to a project, which could include several post graduate studies, public exhibitions etc. Such additional activities within an extended project would exceed that which my Department would, under normal circumstances, be liable towards. These additional activities would be for NIEA to justify and fund. A detailed programme and breakdown of anticipated costs associated with the proposed overall project has yet to be set before my officials for their consideration, however, I am pleased to confirm my Department's commitment to making £500,000 available to the post excavation project.

Given the potential for this project to generate considerable tourism in Northern Ireland in the future, you may wish to consider an approach to the Tourism Minister for a contribution towards the additional funding requirement.

NI Water: Water and Sewerage Charges

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of NI Water's average water and sewerage charges to businesses for 2013/14.

(AQO 4674/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that from 1 April this year it has reduced all water and sewerage charges by an average of 2.7%. Given the difficult economic climate this decrease in the amount that all non-domestic customers pay for water and sewerage services is particularly welcome news and it will benefit all sectors of our economy.

The reductions have been made possible by, amongst other things, the significant sustainable cost efficiencies which have been delivered by NIW over the Price Control 10 period spanning 2010/2013 and its commitment to endeavour to deliver further savings in 2013/14.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Links with PSNI

Mrs Dobson asked Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive points system, to detail the links which exist between the Housing Executive and the PSNI.

(AQW 25744/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive has advised that when an applicant applies for housing they are assessed and awarded points according to their housing need. Points are awarded in accordance

with the Rules of the Housing Selection Scheme (HSS) and the level of points awarded will determine their position on the Waiting List.

An applicant may qualify for the award of points under four categories, namely;

- 1 Intimidation (200 points)
- 2 Insecurity of Tenure (50 or 70 points) – (Homeless / Threatened with Homelessness – Full Duty Applicant (F.D.A.))
- 3 Housing Conditions (a cumulative range of points (from 2 – 10) for Sharing/Overcrowding/Disrepair and Time in Housing Need.
- 4 Health and Social Well-Being Assessment (a cumulative range of points (from 2 – 20) for Functionality/Primary and Social Needs/Complex Needs

If there is a security issue (risk/threats) being investigated as part of the housing need assessment, staff in the Housing Executive's local offices may contact the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI). The Housing Executive has an Information Sharing Protocol in place with the PSNI and information may be requested through an agreed pro-forma to establish if any risks/ threats exist.

Information received from the PSNI assists the Housing Executive to determine if there is a risk and the level of the risk and to decide whether an applicant should be awarded intimidation points, subject to the criteria detailed in Rule 23 of the HSS. A police report may also assist the Housing Executive in determining if an applicant has a priority need in relation to an applicant's homelessness assessment.

Housing Executive: Consultant Contracts

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 4498/11-15, to whom were the consultancy contracts awarded; and how they were selected for the new multi-discipline consultant contracts for maintenance.

(AQW 25788/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the consultancy contracts were awarded off the framework to the following:

- JCP Consulting Ltd;
- Patrick F Corr (Consortium);
- Moore MacDonald & Partners Ltd;
- URS Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd (Consortium);
- V B Evans & Company.

These contracts were awarded in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended). The awarding procedure was that of Most Economically Advantageous Tender.

Appeals Service: Statements of Reason

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to Statements of Reason from the Appeals Service, to detail (i) how many requests are outstanding; and (ii) from what date.

(AQW 25985/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At 25 September 2013 there were 484 requests for Statement of Reasons outstanding within the Appeal Service. The numbers of requests for Statement of Reasons include where a request for a Record of Proceedings is also made. The oldest outstanding request was received on 27 February 2012.

Appeals Service: Statements of Reason

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development why there is a delay in supplying Statements of Reason from the Appeals Service.

(AQW 25986/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The writing of a Statement of Reason is a judicial matter and not something on which I can comment. However the Department has recently introduced new arrangements to support the judicial members and help reduce delays in providing Statements of Reasons.

Legal Cases: Cost

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 24827/11-15, to detail (i) why his Department is unable to provide the information for sections (i) and (ii); (ii) the cost of all legal cases for each year since 2007; (iii) the cost of the most expensive legal case his Department lost during this time; and (iv) why his Department does not disaggregate the costs of judicial cases.

(AQW 26002/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the Member to my response to AQW 24827/11-15. As the Department does not hold the information in the format requested, it is therefore not possible to provide the Member with an answer to the questions.

Benefits: Work Capability Assessment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the proportion of applications for (a) employment and support allowance; and (b) incapacity benefit reassessment that were rejected on the basis of the findings of a work capability assessment in both the latest period for which figures are available and the preceding period; and (ii) the proportion of such decisions that were (a) reversed; and (b) upheld on appeal.

(AQW 26009/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Employment and Support Allowance was introduced in October 2008 to replace Incapacity Benefit.

In February 2011 work commenced to reassess the claims of approximately 83,000 existing Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) claimants to determine if they are entitled to Employment and Support Allowance. The final cases will commence reassessment in early March 2014.

The information requested is detailed in this table

Year	Employment and Support Allowance disallowance rate	Incapacity Benefit reassessment disallowance rate*	Appeals upheld in claimant favour**	Appeals upheld in Department's favour**
2012-13	34%	17% (February 2012)	35%	65%
2013-Aug 2013	15%	30% (February 2013)	35%	65%

* The figures reported reflect the cumulative disallowance rate from the start of reassessment in February 2011.

** Figures include the outcomes of appeals against Incapacity Benefit Reassessment decisions, which, as the appeal is against the Work Capability Assessment outcome, are treated as an Employment and Support Allowance appeals.

Public Realm Works: Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the timetable for the start of the public realm works in Holywood.
(AQW 26018/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Over the past 18 months my Department has been working with representatives from North Down Borough Council, town centre management and the local community to develop a major public realm scheme for Holywood. The works will address all aspects of street design including paving, kerbstones, street furniture, lighting and planting. The total value of the works is estimated to be £2.4 million, with my Department investing £1.4 million and Council investing £1 million. A contractor is due to be appointed in December 2013, onsite construction work will start in late March early April 2014 and the scheme will take one year to complete.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the timetable for the completion of the installation of double glazing in homes across North Down.

(AQW 26060/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have two phases of double glazing still to go on site in the North Down area. In the current financial year a scheme for 244 dwellings in Bloomfield/Rathgill, Groomsport and Kilcooley is programmed to start in March 2014. However, the start date is subject to resolving the current delays with the tendering process.

In 2014/15 a scheme for 196 dwellings in Holywood and Conlig is currently programmed to start in April 2014 but it is likely to slip to later in 2014. These schemes should address any remaining double glazing for Housing Executive homes in the North Down area.

Housing Executive: Vacant Domestic Dwellings

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of vacant domestic dwellings in the social housing sector in each of Dungannon and South Tyrone Council's district electoral areas; and what plans he has to replace or to bring these dwellings up to a level fit for human habitation.

(AQW 26067/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to Housing Executive dwellings, the information is not available in the format requested as they do not collate information by Council's electoral ward. However, they have advised that they currently have 37 void properties throughout the Dungannon and South Tyrone area. Two of these properties are Orbits situated in areas where demand has been met and therefore they may be sold on the open market, subject to an economic appraisal.

Another Housing Executive void is a Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwelling in the Ballygawley Estate, an area of low demand, and this may be taken back into Housing Executive stock. The remaining 34 are made up of void properties awaiting change of tenancy repairs under the Housing Executive's response maintenance contract or are difficult to let properties located in areas such as Fivemiletown and Caledon where demand has been met.

There are also two vacant Housing Association dwellings, both of which are in the Dungannon electoral ward.

Tackling the issue of empty homes is one of my major priorities. I recently launched my Department's Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan, which will be delivered in partnership with key stakeholders, including the Housing Executive, Housing Associations and local Councils. The Strategy will bring empty homes in every tenure back into use.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development when he was first supplied with a draft answer to AQW 1004/11-15. (AQW 26088/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The answer to AQW 1004/11-15 was provided to the Member on 17th June 2013.

Social Housing: NIPSA Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Public Services Association commissioned Keeping our Housing Public report; and what consideration has been given to its three alternative proposals for the future of social housing provision.

(AQW 26129/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have said that I want to engage widely with all stakeholders in exploring and developing proposals for housing reform, and therefore welcome the report commissioned by NIPSA and will consider what new learning and insights it can bring.

However, it is important to highlight the facts on some of the issues raised.

Across the studies looking at housing structures in Northern Ireland including the most recent 2011 PwC report, there was a consensus that the current structures no longer support optimal delivery and it was a time for change.

In relation to local councils and borrowing powers, the Treasury rules for non-departmental public bodies like the NIHE, are different. Over £5 billion investment will be required over the next 30 years to maintain and improve the current Housing Executive stock. Northern Ireland simply cannot meet this bill from public funds alone. I share the report's focus on investing in the future; this is exactly what my proposals aim to achieve.

In relation to rent levels, annual rent increases have been a feature of social housing over many years and are necessary to maintain standards. However, I am clear that tenants should be protected from any excessive or unaffordable rent increases. With this in mind I have proposed that an independent rent advisory panel will be established to agree annual rent levels. The policy on rent will be established by my Department and subject to Assembly scrutiny.

Delivering Social Change: Dereliction

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his commitment to the principle of tackling dereliction and community eyesores as part of the rollout of social enterprise incubation hubs via the Delivering Social Change signature programmes.

(AQW 26143/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A key aim of the Delivering Social Change Pilot Programme – Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs is to address street-level vacancy in town centres and the more deprived areas, by bringing back into use vacant commercial units within those areas. I remain committed to the principles of this signature project to address dereliction and reduce street level vacancy and can advise that every hub location currently under consideration includes a number of vacant commercial premises. This two year pilot programme will help to address community eyesores by bringing buildings back into everyday use.

Jobseeker's Allowance: Penalties

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the current penalties for individuals who receive Job Seekers Allowance when in full time employment.

(AQW 26152/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An individual is not entitled to receive Jobseekers Allowance whilst in remunerative employment which involves work for, on average, 16 hours or more (24 hours for partners of people receiving income based Jobseekers Allowance).

Where a claimant engages in remunerative work while receiving Jobseekers Allowance and does not report it, it constitutes benefit fraud and they will lose their entitlement to benefit and will be expected to refund any money overpaid to them. The Social Security Agency also applies a range of penalties to those who commit such offences. At the lower end of the scale a caution or an administrative penalty (30% of the overpayment) may be offered and in more serious cases a recommendation is made to the Public Prosecution Service to prosecute the case through the Courts. In addition, where benefit entitlement

continues, payment may be reduced or cease altogether. In every case the Social Security Agency will seek to recover any losses to the Agency as a result of the overpayment of benefit.

Social Housing: Greenisland House

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made to secure funding commitments and obtain planning permission for new accommodation and services on the site of Greenisland House.

(AQW 26200/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A scheme at this location to provide accommodation for 32 frail elderly people is included in my Department's Social Housing Development Programme for 2013/14. The scheme is being taken forward by Trinity Housing Association.

Provisional funding has been set aside for 2013/14 and will be confirmed on receipt of an approvable application from Trinity. Trinity expects to make that application in November. At that point, the scheme detail will be assessed and provided all is in order, funding will be confirmed.

Trinity made its planning application on 29 August 2013 and anticipates planning permission being granted in time to start construction work in February 2014.

DSD: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 26221/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since 2007 there have been one hundred and forty six North South Ministerial Council meetings, including twelve in Plenary and seven in Institutional format, which have been attended by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

There have been twenty eight meetings under the aegis of the British Irish Council attended by Ministers, including twelve at Summit level.

My Department does not collate information on other bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC involving myself or DSD officials. For example, because of the close working relationship between the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance Service in DSD and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including the running of GB services from Northern Ireland, there are extensive meetings taking place, both face to face and via video and teleconferencing with DWP.

Housing Executive: Tenancy Fraud

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the recent Audit Office Report on Tenancy Fraud which indicated that up to 2,400 homes may be occupied fraudulently, what the estimated annual loss is to the public purse on the basis of this figure.

(AQW 26251/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The report that was published by the Audit Office on Tenancy Fraud addresses what the tenancy fraud potentially could be costing the taxpayer in Northern Ireland.

The report has estimated that every 100 additional properties recovered through a proactive detection programme would have potential to save around £800,000 in costs for private rented accommodation.

The report further provides an alternative method of quantifying the cost to the public purse of unlawful tenancies by calculating the replacement building cost for properties that are no longer available for social housing. This is estimated at £200 million.

Full details of these calculations can be found at Page 8 of the report.

The Housing Executive at the present time has not calculated any potential annual loss to the public purse based on the estimated figures produced in this report.

Empty Homes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the 32000 empty homes identified by his Department are in North Down.

(AQW 26254/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am informed by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services that the most recent figures (as at 31 August 2013) indicate a total of 30,186 empty residential properties, of which, 815 are in the North Down Borough Council area. DFP have advised these figures should be treated with caution as there is no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing: Bloomfield, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the next stage of the transfer of pensioners' bungalows to a housing association for the residents of Ballyree Drive, Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 26345/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As the tenants in Bloomfield bungalows have overwhelmingly voted in favour of transfer, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Oaklee Housing Association will be drawing up and signing the legal transfer agreement; this process will take a couple of months.

Once the legal transfer agreement is in place, and Oaklee have secured a contractor to undertake the refurbishments, the upgrading works will commence. It is currently envisaged that the contractor will be on site in March 2014, with the works advancing in 10 or 11 phases over a period of 22 to 24 months.

Social Fund and Crisis Loan Helpline

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of missed calls to the Social Fund and Crisis Loan helpline in 2012/13, broken down by each Jobs and Benefits office.

(AQW 26352/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are two separate Freephone numbers available for claimants to contact the Social Security Agency in relation to Social Fund Enquiries and Crisis Loan applications. The Social Fund Enquiry number is dedicated to handling enquiries about Social Fund while the Crisis Loan Claims number is used by claimants wanting to make a claim to a Crisis Loan. Not all Jobs & Benefits offices deal with these calls. The following tables set out the available information in respect of each number:

Social Fund Enquiries – 2012/13

Site	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Not Answered
Antrim	54685	53669	1016
Lisburn	59148	58290	858
Totals	113833	111959	1874

Crisis Loans Tele Claims Service - 2012/13

Site	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Not Answered
Antrim	188166	180605	7561
Andersonstown	13606	13164	442
Banbridge	773	684	89
Downpatrick	32978	4430	28548
Dungannon	633	421	212
Enniskillen	1547	51	1496
Falls Road	53563	21468	32095
Foyle	15187	2881	12306
Knockbreda	6591	1527	5064
Lisburn	2660	294	2366
Lisnagelvin	1078	815	263
Lurgan	2034	444	1590
Newry	712	656	56
Omagh	962	935	27
Portadown	1729	1523	206
Shaftsbury Square	4512	83	4429
Strabane	2008	401	1607
Totals	328739	230382	98357

Lower North Belfast Community Council

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail each chairperson of the Lower North Belfast Community Council from 1995 to 2007.

(AQW 26354/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Department records in respect of the Lower North Belfast Community Council are only available from 2005. The chairperson from 2005 to 2007 is recorded as a Mrs Catherine McCarten.

Belfast Partnership Boards

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail which body is accountable for the five Belfast Partnership Boards.

(AQW 26357/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The five Belfast Area Partnerships are independent community led regeneration agencies established in the mid to late nineties under the Making Belfast Work Initiative. The organisations are companies limited by guarantee and are registered charities. The Board of each Partnership brings together community, voluntary, elected and private sector representatives, along with public sector officials to promote the regeneration of their areas. Public sector representatives have observer status on Partnership Boards.

My Department currently provides grant funding to the Belfast Area Partnerships through the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund. This funding is typically for some core costs and associated overheads. The Partnerships are accountable to the Department for their appropriate use of that funding.

Unemployment: Long-term Claimants

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what effect the reported changes in the way long-term unemployment claimants report for availability for work will have on resources within his Department and its relevant agencies.

(AQW 26470/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At this point in time, as I have not seen any detailed proposals relating to the Help-to-Work scheme as announced by the Chancellor, or any further emerging proposals from the Department for Work and Pensions, it is not possible to predict the effect on resources within my Department and associated Agencies.

As I have previously stated in relation to Welfare Reform, I will seek to ensure that any changes to the entitlement rules for Jobseekers Allowance take account of Northern Ireland's particular circumstances and that the focus should be on helping people back into the workplace.

Social security is a devolved matter and therefore any changes would be subject to the Northern Ireland legislative process through the Assembly.

Housing: Help-to-buy Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development by what means will local people be able to access the Help to Buy scheme.

(AQW 26502/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to Housing Executive dwellings, the information is not available in the format requested as they do not collate information by Council's electoral ward. However, they have advised that they currently have 37 void properties throughout the Dungannon and South Tyrone area. Two of these properties are Orbits situated in areas where demand has been met and therefore they may be sold on the open market, subject to an economic appraisal.

Another Housing Executive void is a Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwelling in the Ballygawley Estate, an area of low demand, and this may be taken back into Housing Executive stock. The remaining 34 are made up of void properties awaiting change of tenancy repairs under the Housing Executive's response maintenance contract or are difficult to let properties located in areas such as Fivemiletown and Caledon where demand has been met.

There are also two vacant Housing Association dwellings, both of which are in the Dungannon electoral ward.

Tackling the issue of empty homes is one of my major priorities. I recently launched my Department's Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan, which will be delivered in partnership with key stakeholders, including the Housing Executive, Housing Associations and local Councils. The Strategy will bring empty homes in every tenure back into use.

Housing Executive: Oil Pay-as-you-go Scheme

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has explored further the option of using the Pay as You Go for Oil Scheme in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties.

(AQO 4678/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department undertook a pilot with Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services for a Pay as You Go for Oil system. The pilot commenced in February 2012 and the participants included Housing Executive

tenants, householders who had been assisted through the Warm Homes Scheme and private referrals. The homes were in Dungannon, Coalisland, Newcastle and Camlough. The technology was installed in 17 low income households with the aim of testing the technology and the process. Carillion and the Housing Executive both completed separate evaluations of the pilot. The convenience of using the Pay as You Go for Oil system was highlighted as a major benefit. However, the results of the pilot survey were disappointing regarding the proportion of participants benefiting from lower oil costs.

Whilst Departmental economists have serious concerns about the feasibility of the Pay as You Go Oil scheme from a cost/benefit perspective, I have asked officials to continue engagement with Kingspan and Carillion as they develop their proposal for a Pay as You Go oil system.

Personal Independence Payments: Assessment Criteria

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what flexibility exists to introduce assessment criteria for Personal Independence Payments different from those in Great Britain.

(AQO 4676/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As you are aware, proposals to introduce Personal Independence Payment are contained in the Welfare Reform Bill which is currently under consideration by this Assembly. The main entitlement rules for the new benefit, including the assessment criteria, will be set out in secondary legislation.

I fully accept that it is essential to get the Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria right and with that in mind:

- The development of the assessment has been carried out in collaboration with an advisory group of independent specialists in health, social care and disability, which included people with disabilities;
- The criteria have been revised throughout the development process taking into account the testing of current Disability Living Allowance claimants, including people from Northern Ireland, and consultation with disabled people and disability organisations in Great Britain and Northern Ireland;
- Drafts of the criteria have also been shared throughout the development process in order to gain views and opinions at the earliest opportunities and to feed them into the design of the criteria; and
- Since 2010 there have been four formal consultations on the introduction of Personal Independence Payment, including the draft assessment criteria.

Members are aware that there are many beneficial and practical reasons for maintaining a single system of social security across the UK, not least the financial considerations. I do not need to remind you of the issues if we were to consider deviating from this.

I continue to work with Executive colleagues and the Department for Work and Pensions' Ministers to ensure that in bringing forward Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland we take account of local circumstances and take action where possible to protect those most in need. I recognise the importance of ensuring that what is in place in Northern Ireland delivers a positive experience for claimants and I am committed to having a transparent and empathetic claims and assessment process for Personal Independence Payment.

I understand and appreciate that people are anxious and concerned about the introduction of Personal Independence Payment and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, will be working to fully support people as they encounter the new benefit.

Ultimately, decisions relating to the introduction of Personal Independence Payment in Northern Ireland will fall to the Assembly.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the double glazing schemes for Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties.

(AQO 4683/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Within a short time of coming into office, I quickly recognised that whilst the previous focus had been on the new build programme, it was also essential I ensured that the upkeep of existing homes and the need for Housing Executive maintenance work to continue was also a priority.

When I looked at the need for a double glazing programme, I was astounded to learn that initially it was estimated that 48,000 homes required double glazing. I was even more concerned about the apparent lack of haste in dealing with this, as the Housing Executive originally planned to have this work completed by 2021.

That is why I ensured that in the Programme for Government, the Northern Ireland Executive gave a commitment that the thermal efficiency of all Housing Executive properties would be improved by 2014/15 through the provision of double glazing.

The Housing Executive has advised that the double glazing procurement process is currently subject to a court injunction which has prevented them from proceeding. Work is underway to have the injunction lifted and the Housing Executive is hopeful that this will occur in the next week or so. If the Housing Executive is successful in having the injunction lifted they will proceed with the appointment to the Framework and in turn commence secondary competitions to award contracts as soon as possible. This should allow the programme to recommence during 2013/14.

It is still my intention to make sure that the commitment given in the Programme for Government to have double glazing installed in all Housing Executive properties by 2015 is achieved.

Housing: Insulation

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has considered introducing any pilot schemes to help private homeowners to bring their homes up to current standards of insulation.

(AQO 4684/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Warm Homes Scheme is my Department's main fuel poverty scheme which helps privately owned and privately rented low income households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. The Warm Homes Scheme has an annual target of installing energy efficiency improvements in 9,000 homes and we have been meeting the target consistently since 2009. The Warm Homes Scheme provides a range of measures, including insulation of lofts and cavity walls, to make homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient.

In addition, the boiler replacement scheme which is available in Northern Ireland only, helps owner occupiers to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. To date 7,320 replacement boilers have been installed (3,790 of which have been installed this financial year alone). The scheme is open to owner occupiers whose household income is less than £40,000 and who have a boiler which is at least 15 years old.

The Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland manages a range of energy efficiency improvement schemes for low income households in fuel poverty through the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme. Householders who just miss out on the qualification criteria for the Warm Homes Scheme can still get help with improving the energy efficiency of their homes through grant from the NISEP schemes.

I have also asked the Housing Executive to urgently develop a programme to carry out much needed work on over 5000 "No Fines" houses across Northern Ireland. "No Fines" houses were constructed using a type of single skin concrete wall with no cavity and I believe that these properties would benefit from a programme of specialist external insulation.

North West Regional Science Park

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on progress of the planned science park at the Fort George site.

(AQO 4685/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Work began on the construction of the North West Regional Science Park on 29 July 2013. Heron Bros Ltd of Draperstown has been appointed by NWRSP as the main contractor for the project which is due to be completed by 28 July 2014. When completed, the building will comprise four floors with cafe and meeting spaces on the ground floor.

Millar's Lane Day Centre

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the potential for redevelopment of the Millar's Lane Day Centre in Ballybeen.

(AQO 4686/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Millar's Lane Day Care Centre in Ballybeen has been closed for some time and remains in the ownership of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I understand some community led redevelopment proposals are currently being explored and that my officials have been engaged in some preliminary discussions with local elected representatives and the Public Health Agency with a view to facilitating further consideration. I am content that my officials remain engaged in this process in the interests of the local and wider East Belfast community.

Welfare Reform Act

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development what lessons he is learning from the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act in England.

(AQO 4687/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A number of Welfare Reform initiatives have been implemented in Great Britain since April 2013 and my officials are working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that the lessons learnt help shape the way that Welfare Reform is implemented in Northern Ireland.

Whilst it is too early to fully assess the impact of the measures which have been introduced, there is some evidence starting to emerge that would support my concerns about the negative impacts of the cost cutting elements of Welfare Reform for example, the introduction of the social sector size criteria resulting in increasing levels of rent arrears and increased pressure on Housing Associations and Local Authorities to find smaller homes for families to downsize as a consequence of the introduction of a size criteria in the social housing sector.

I am therefore continuing to explore with Executive colleagues whether there is scope for additional measures to be taken outside of the benefit system which will help to ameliorate some of the negative impacts.

Housing: Bloomfield, Bangor

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed transfer of ownership and refurbishment of the Bloomfield bungalows, Bangor.

(AQO 4688/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am pleased to report that on 10 September 2013 I formally consented to the Stock Transfer of 72 Housing Executive properties at Bloomfield Bungalows, Bangor to Oaklee Housing Association under the provisions of Article 88C of the Housing (NI) Order 1981.

I can confirm that, as part of a comprehensive consultation exercise, tenants at Bloomfield have overwhelmingly welcomed the proposals with a majority of 96.7% in favour of the transfer proposal.

This very significant development paves the way for the much needed multi element improvement scheme to progress to refurbish these properties and bring them up to modern standards.

The next step in the process is for Oaklee Housing Association, the Housing Executive and their legal teams to draft the necessary Transfer Agreement and Development Agreement required to implement the transfer.

I am confident that this scheme will bring real and tangible benefits to the residents of Bloomfield Bungalows and I look forward to the continued successful rollout of the Stock Transfer programme which will result in up to 2000 properties receiving much needed refurbishment works.

Town Centre Regeneration

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his Department's efforts to reinvigorate and regenerate town centres.

(AQO 4689/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In February of this year my Department published the report of the Northern Ireland High Street Taskforce, which I commissioned to review the support provided by DSD to town and city centres. The Taskforce Report contained seven recommendations for DSD which I accepted.

Since the publication of the report good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations. A significant number of Public Realm and Revitalisation/Restore schemes have been completed or are in progress. Development Briefs continue to be brought to the market and Urban Development Grants provided to stimulate private sector investment.

Efforts are also being made to support traders through the introduction of legislation in relation to Liquor Licensing, Pavement Cafes and Street Trading. In addition legislation to facilitate the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) has received Royal Assent, regulations are being consulted upon and I have recently announced the award of a contract to provide expertise to support the establishment of a number of pilot BIDs in Northern Ireland.

In an effort to broaden the role and function of town and city centres I will also be reviewing Living Over the Shops (LOTS) with a view to developing a new scheme to encourage people to live in town centres. I will also be bringing forward proposals to the Executive on a policy for Community Asset Transfer. This has the potential to stimulate the diversification of services on offer in town centres and bring vacant buildings back into use.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Printer Replacement Programme

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the cost of the current programme to replace printers in Members' offices; and (ii) the income that will be derived from the discarded printers.

(AQW 18691/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) The cost of the current programme to replace printers in Members' offices is £ 92,237.40. In addition, an estimated £8,930.00 will be paid to cover delivery and installation costs.
- (ii) No income has been derived from the disposal of the old printer stocks. The printers currently being replaced were installed in 2007 and due to their age, generally poor condition and reliability they are deemed to have no residual value.

Printer Replacement Programme

Mr Campbell asked the Assembly Commission, in relation to the current printer replacement programme, how many MLAs have declined the offer of a replacement printer.

(AQW 18771/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): To date, no MLAs have declined the supply of a replacement printer.

Education Service Programme

Mr Storey asked the Assembly Commission how many schools have participated in the Education Service programme in the last 12 months.

(AQO 3642/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): From 12 March 2012 to 12 March 2013, 393 Primary and Secondary groups (12,741 individuals) from 248 schools participated in the Education Service Programmes. Of the 393 school groups taking part, 356 groups received Education Programmes in Parliament Buildings and the remaining 37 groups received outreach programmes in their schools. Including other groups (youth groups, universities etc.) the total number of groups taking part in the Education Service Programme was 546 – a total of 16,798 individuals.

Computers: Disposal

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission how it disposes of computers that are no longer used, and whether it has considered donating them to charities or community groups.

(AQW 21079/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly last disposed of significant numbers of operational computers in 2007. At that time the Assembly Commission considered donation of some of the recycled equipment to a selected charity or charities. Resale or donation of redundant equipment was not recommended due to legal issues and the obsolescence of equipment available.

The Assembly Commission intends to replace all laptop computers in 2013, and as part of that project, will consider the donation of redundant equipment to charity or community groups; however there are several important factors to be considered including:

- The Data Protection Act (DPA) where obsolete computer equipment may have little or no residual financial value but may still hold valuable information that is covered by the DPA. Therefore care must be exercised during the storage, handling and processing of such equipment.
- The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) legislation and the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) legislation lay a duty on the owner of the equipment to dispose of it in an audited, approved manner to reduce the environmental impact of disposal.
- Liability for Dangerous or Defective Equipment for any equipment which the NI Assembly Commission may sell or donate to third parties.
- Software Licensing Agreements that the NI Assembly has entered into, dictate that the software licenses may not be sold on to third parties and that all such software should be removed during any disposal of equipment.
- Any company undertaking the disposal of computer equipment would require payment to undertake the necessary refurbishment work.

The options for the disposal of redundant computer equipment will be explored in more detail as part of the business case to be presented to the Assembly Commission later this year.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 11 October 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

United States Visit

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the total cost of their recent visit to the USA; and (ii) who accompanied them on their visit.

(AQW 2637/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The cost of our delegation's visit to the United States in September 2011 is broken down as follows:

Flights	£38,388.33 & \$4,080.00
Accommodation	£9,519.71
Car Hire	\$13,665.76
Subsistence	£1,059.85

We were accompanied on our visit by five members of staff, two of whom are Special Advisers.

Parades: Ulster Covenant

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the Parades Commission's determination, for their assessment of the behaviour witnessed outside St. Patrick's Church, North Belfast and St. Matthews Church, East Belfast during the Ulster Covenant Parade on 29 September 2012.

(AQO 2653/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The right to assembly, the right to express cultural identity, the right to protest and the rights of those in and living in proximity to parades are at the heart of the proposals agreed at Hillsborough on parades and protests. We are convinced that the principles of mutual respect and tolerance are key to resolving the issue of disputed parades and counter-parades.

Both paraders and protesters should behave in a respectable and dignified manner, and the rule of law should be observed.

Press Office: Irish News

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there is a policy or understanding within their Department's press office that not all Minister's will engage with the Irish News.

(AQW 18901/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: All OFMDFM press releases are distributed to all media outlets. We routinely undertake a broad range of interviews with all sections of the media, be it print, broadcast or online. Journalists are invited to departmental events.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

(AQO 3228/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Good Relations Strategy "Together: Building a United Community" is available online.

Hospitality

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what was the total spend on hospitality by their Department in 2011/12.

(AQW 19483/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The total spend on hospitality by our Department in 2011/12 was £160,864.

A significant proportion of the Department's hospitality spend relates to activities in the Department's offices in Washington DC and Brussels. The role of these offices is to support Northern Ireland's engagement with North America and the EU and to raise the positive profile of Northern Ireland.

South America Visit

Mr Wells asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they plan to visit South America during 2013 to promote investment in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 3350/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As part of our work to build relationships with the world's leading economies, we visited Brazil in March and undertook a programme of activities in São Paulo, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro to develop economic, political, educational, sporting, tourism and cultural links between Brazil and Northern Ireland.

Our visit laid the foundations for a follow-up trade mission to Brazil in May which was led by our colleague, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Good Relations Indicators

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the publication of the latest Good Relations Indicators Update.

(AQO 3353/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We welcome the findings that indicate that relations have improved between the two main traditions here. We are committed to improving relations and whilst the statistics included in the latest report are not the solution, they will inform future policy decisions.

It is important that we do not become complacent and we are committed to continue to improve on this trend and achieve our vision of a united and shared community particularly given the recent difficulties that have played out on the street.

We will continue to work towards creating the conditions to ensure that all sections of our community are empowered to contribute positively and have opportunities to learn from each other and increase understanding of each other's traditions.

The report's findings will enable us to progress on an evidenced based approach which will allow us to build on a shared and better future for everyone.

Peace IV Funding: Brussels

Ms Ruane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any discussions they had in Brussels in regard to Peace IV funding.

(AQO 3405/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We travelled to Brussels as negotiations to conclude an agreement on the EU budget for 2014-2020 entered a critical stage.

We used the opportunity to raise key issues of importance at the highest levels within the European Union.

One of the issues that required our presence in Brussels was to make a final push to ensure inclusion of financial provision for a possible PEACE IV. We raised this issue at a number of high level meetings, including with the President of the Parliament and the President of the Council. Our request received a positive response and built on the considerable efforts already made on this issue.

We are therefore very pleased to be able to indicate that the current position is that provision has been included for 150 million Euros for a PEACE IV Programme.

The European Parliament must give its approval. However, it is a significant step forward and we will continue to work with the European Parliament to secure its final agreement

Brazil Visit

Mr Wells asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what they hope to achieve as a result of their planned visit to Brazil.

(AQO 3408/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our visit to Brazil was part of our work to build relationships with the world's leading economies. We undertook a programme in São Paulo, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro.

Our objectives included developing economic, political, educational, sporting, tourism and cultural links with Brazil.

We took part in a series of engagements with political and business leaders. We also had the opportunity to deliver speeches at one of Brazil's most prestigious universities and at the Brazilian Centre for International Relations.

Given the importance of football in Brazilian society, we launched a George Best exhibition at São Paulo Football Club that emphasised his international reputation as one of the greatest players in the history of the game.

We also hosted receptions to promote Northern Ireland as a tourism destination and as a location with a thriving culture and arts sector.

Our visit laid the foundations for a follow-up trade mission to Brazil in May which was led by our colleague, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Hong Kong: Trade initiatives

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 17449/11-15, what potential initiatives were identified with the Hong Kong Government's Secretary for Finance.

(AQW 20152/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We discussed a number of proposals, including possible trade missions of interest to the Hong Kong government, collaborations in education and research and development programmes and potential trade opportunities for various NI export industries.

Following the meeting, we pursued these ideas with Invest NI and, as a result, it has agreed to bring a trade mission to Hong Kong later this year.

Education: Desegregation

Mr McCarthy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which of their Department's policies promotes the desegregation of the education system; and what are the timescales for the realisation of these policies.

(AQW 20162/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department does not have responsibility for the education system. Responsibility for managing the education system rests with the Department of Education.

Universal Credit

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when they will publish the research commissioned by their Department from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, on assessing the impact of Universal Credit on poverty rates in different types of households from now until 2020; and (ii) what assurances they can give that this research will be published before Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQW 20272/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The project entitled 'Poverty in Northern Ireland from 2011 to 2020 – the impact of Universal Credit' is being carried out by the Institute of Fiscal Studies; lead researchers are James Browne, Mike Brewer and Robert Joyce.

The overall research looks at the impact of aspects of Welfare Reform on poverty and child poverty in particular. The two main outputs from the research are two reports, the first of which looks specifically at the impact of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland, broadening the scope to look at its effect on household incomes here more generally and on work incentives.

The second report gives a background on poverty in Northern Ireland and how this compares to the rest of the UK and produces forecasts of poverty rates here for children and working-age adults for each year from 2011-12 to 2015-16 and for 2020-21. The report examines what is driving these trends, in particular examining the impact of tax and benefit changes and developments in the labour market, for example concerning employment and earnings.

The initial report looking at Universal Credit impacts was published on 19 March 2013 and can be found at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/universal-credit-ni-impact-challenges-report.pdf>.

The second report looking at poverty rates was published on 7 May 2013 and can be found at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/child-working-age-poverty-ni-2010-2020.pdf>.

Armed Forces Covenant

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the response of the administrations in Great Britain and that of the Northern Ireland Executive with regard to building support for and delivering the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 20937/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It would not be appropriate for the Executive to comment on the response of other administrations as the matter is reserved.

We have already agreed that officials engage with Ministry of Defence officials in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant.

China: Second Visit

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether and when they are planning a second visit to China. (AQW 21044/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following an invitation from the Chinese Government we visited Beijing in May this year.

Brazil: Businesses and Potential Investors

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many meetings with businesses and potential investors were held during their recent trip to Brazil; and how the success of the trip will be quantified. (AQW 21102/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Specific detail in relation to potential investors is confidential. However, during our six-day official visit to Brazil, we undertook fourteen separate meetings during which we promoted investment, trade, sport and tourism as well as mutually beneficial relationships with universities.

As part of our engagements, we met the Vice President and Board of Federacao das Industrias do Estado de Sao Paulo (FIESP), Brazil's version of the CBI, in São Paulo. We used that meeting to promote investment and trade opportunities in the São Paulo metropolitan area, which has 22 million inhabitants and is the largest commercial centre in South America. At that meeting we secured support for the trade mission, which the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister will lead to the city in May. We also visited Porto Maravilha, the biggest redevelopment project in the Southern Hemisphere, to promote our expertise in harbour regeneration and to encourage links and an exchange of expertise with Titanic Quarter.

In Brasilia, we had separate meetings with the Brazilian Foreign Minister and the Deputy Trade Minister, where we secured their agreement to support the forthcoming trade mission.

It should be emphasised that this was our first official visit to Brazil, where knowledge of Northern Ireland is limited. Every aspect of our itinerary was aimed at promoting the very best of what we have to offer.

St Patrick's Day: Events Funding

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which St Patrick's Day events their Department funds; and how much funding is provided in each case. (AQW 21156/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM does not directly fund any St Patrick's Day events. Funding for some activities is available from the Community Relations Council and District Councils if it meets the relevant criteria.

Flags: Review of Protocol

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for an update on the review of the flags protocol; and (ii) how long the review has been ongoing. (AQW 21945/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Flags Protocol Working Group was convened in December 2011 with a view to bringing forward recommendations on a revised approach to dealing with issues around flags and emblems.

As you are aware as a member of the group, a draft discussion paper has been produced by the Flags Protocol Working Group and shared with the Good Relations Strategy Cross-Party Working Group. An All-Party Group, chaired by Richard Haass, will consider and make recommendations on matters, including parades and protests; flags, symbols and emblems and related matters; and dealing with the past.

OFMDFM: Freedom of Information

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of Freedom of Information Requests in their Department which remain outstanding by more than twelve months, including how long each request is outstanding and an explanation for each delay. (AQW 22813/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department has no requests outstanding by more than twelve months.

Flags: Protocol Working Group

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister on what date the Flags Protocol Working Group last met. (AQW 22906/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Flags Protocol Working Group last met on 4 April 2012.

An All-Party Group, chaired by Richard Haass, will consider and make recommendations on matters, including parades and protests; flags, symbols and emblems and related matters; and dealing with the past.

Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consultation previous junior Ministers had with victims groups about the proposed Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre.

(AQW 22923/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There was not a formal consultation process. Junior Ministers met with a wide range of organisations. Records of the detail of these discussions are not kept.

Together: Building a United Community: Draft

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list (i) the Executive Ministers; (ii) special advisors; and (iii) civil servants who had (a) a role in the drafting; or (b) sight, prior the afternoon of 9 May 2013, of the document entitled Together: Building a United Community.

(AQW 22938/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Publication of the 'Together: Building a United Community' document was announced on 9 May following finalisation and agreement by us. The document had been under construction within OFMDFM for some time, drawing on inputs from officials and Advisers in OFMDFM, and building on proposals and ideas from Ministers, Advisers, officials in a number of departments and their stakeholders.

The document reflects the consultation on the draft CSI Strategy as well as the work of the All-Party Group on Good Relations.

Together: Building a United Community: Gaelic Games

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the sports elements of 'Together: Building a United Community' will require participants from a unionist background to experience Gaelic games.

(AQW 23134/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No participant will be forced to take part in any activity against their wishes.

Peace Walls: Removal

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the removal of peace walls will be dependent on agreement from communities upon both sides of a wall.

(AQW 23189/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The 10 year programme to reduce and eventually remove all the interface barriers, announced on Tuesday 9 May, is an ambitious target. This will only be achieved by working together with the local community.

No peace walls will be removed without the support and agreement and consent of the communities living around the barriers.

Flags: Flagpoles on Government Buildings

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have had any discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding his proposals to erect flag poles on some government buildings.

(AQO 4061/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There have been no such discussions.

Shared Future: Strategies

Mr Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the strategies for a shared future.

(AQO 4068/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We published the new good relations strategy – Together: Building a United Community – on 23 May 2013. In this strategy we agreed a package of significant and strategic actions aimed at building a prosperous, peaceful and safe society which is enriched by diversity and is welcoming to all.

We are committed to providing the necessary leadership through the Executive to ensure that we achieve our vision of a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

Strategic Support Fund: Staff Posts

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which organisations had four or more staff posts funded under the Strategic Support Fund in (i) 2010/11; (ii) 2011/12; (iii) 2012/13; and (iv) 2013/14.

(AQW 23445/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

2010-2011 and 2011-2012 ¹ *	2012-2013*	2013-2014*
Ashton Community Trust	Ashton Community Trust	Ashton Community Trust
Corpus Christie Services	Corpus Christi Services	Colin Community Counselling
Cunamh	Cunamh	Corpus Christi Services
New Life Counselling	Ely Centre	Cunamh
NICTT	Holy Trinity	Ely Centre
NI Music Therapy Trust	New Life Counselling	FASA
NOVA	NOVA	Holy Trinity
Relatives for Justice	Relatives for Justice	New Life Counselling
Survivors of Trauma	SEFF	NOVA
TARA Centre	WAVE	Relatives for Justice
WAVE		SEFF WAVE

* funding period was 18 months from October 2010 to March 2012

¹ funding period was 18 months from October 2010 to March 2012

* part time staff are included

The Strategic Support Fund (SSF) ceased to operate on 31 March 2013.

The Victims and Survivors Programme 2013/15, administered by the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS), has subsumed all previous funding streams, including the SSF, to take the sector forward and improve the lives of victims and survivors.

China: Human Rights

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) which members of the Chinese Government they met with on their recent visit to China; (ii) whether they raised the issue of human rights with these members; and (iii) what human rights issues were discussed.

(AQW 23790/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We met with Madam Li Xiaolin, President of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, Mr Sun Yongfu, Director General of the Ministry of Commerce, Mr Song Tao, the Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Yuan Guiren, Education Minister and we were delighted to renew our friendship with Madam Liu Yandong, recently promoted to Vice Premier.

We raised issues surrounding promoting democracy in private discussion with the government and believe that sharing our experience may be of benefit as the Chinese society opens up to more ideas, although we need to recognise we are very small in size compared to China and that we are starting out on building a relationship. We must respect the cultures and traditions of other countries and we believe we have more chance of influencing policy as our relationship grows.

China and Other BRIC Countries: Links

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they plan to work more closely with the Irish Government to further develop political, social, economic, and cultural links with China and the other BRIC countries for the benefit of everyone on the island of Ireland.

(AQW 23913/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are increasing our efforts to build relationships with the world's leading economies. This overseas work is starting to pay dividends and we aim to continue to meet influencers and business representatives to promote trade, tourism, inward investment, education, university and government links.

We have met with diplomatic representatives from the Irish and UK embassies and they have been very helpful as we seek to move forward on our International Strategy and engaging with targeted countries.

St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena: Band 7 Sports Hall

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the last structural assessment was conducted of the Band Hall 7 Sports Hall at St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena.

(AQW 24062/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The St Patrick's site was gifted to the Executive under the Hillsborough Agreement to raise funds from the eventual disposal of the site. While security is maintained at the site to protect the buildings, no structural assessments have been carried out on the Band 7 sports hall or any buildings within the former military barracks.

Public Assemblies, Parades and Protest Body

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding allocated to the Public Assemblies Parades and Protest Body over the current budgetary period.

(AQW 24220/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There has been no funding allocated to a "Public Assemblies Parades and Protest Body" over the current budgetary period.

Infrastructure Guarantee Scheme

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the eligibility of business for the £40 billion Infrastructure Guarantee Scheme (i) up to the recent announcement of a package of economic measures; and (ii) in the future.

(AQW 24583/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The UK Guarantee Scheme was introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in July 2012 and is administered through HM Treasury.

It is a credit enhancement mechanism, used to achieve cheaper project finance for major infrastructure project developments that may have stalled due to adverse credit conditions. The scheme is particularly applicable to major utility infrastructure projects.

To be eligible, the scale of the proposed investment needs to be significant (no less than tens of millions of pounds) and no other financing solution can be available to the company on acceptable terms. The project is also required to be ready to commence within the current year.

Building a Prosperous and United Community – The Economic Pact has recently indicated that the Guarantee Scheme's eligibility criteria may in future be applied more flexibly. How this will impact on future infrastructure development will depend on the progression of suitable projects but could potentially be of benefit in addressing medium to long term requirements for energy infrastructure.

Ministerial Visit: Protocol

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the protocol for notifying MLAs when an Executive Minister is visiting their constituency.

(AQW 24726/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The procedures agreed by Executive Ministers for notifying MLAs of Ministerial visits within their constituencies were notified to the Speaker on 12 February 2008 and subsequently brought to the attention of the Business Committee at its meeting on 19 February 2008.

Under these procedures, and taking account of the underlying need to protect the safety and security of Ministers and their officials, MLAs should normally be informed of any Ministerial visit to their respective constituencies not less than 24 hours in advance of the visit. Notification of such visits should include as much detail as possible regarding the reason, location and timing of the visit.

Adherence to these procedures is the responsibility of individual Ministers.

Flags: Protocol Working Group

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to the unanswered priority written question AQW 22906/11-15, which was asked on 10 May 2013, on what date did the Flags Protocol Working Group last meet.

(AQW 24732/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A response to AQ 22906/11-15 issued on 9 October 2013.

International Relations

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans are in place to develop international relations further.

(AQO 4422/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Recent events have created unprecedented international exposure for our local businesses and tourism industry and we recognise the need to capitalise on these opportunities.

The G8 Summit proved to be a resounding success. We established important initial contact with World Leaders and met directly with President Obama, Prime Minister Abe of Japan and Prime Minister Zeidan of Libya to discuss economic and partnership issues.

We had a hugely productive visit to China when we held a series of meetings with senior Chinese Government officials. We also met Senior Ministers from the Indian Government to focus on trade and investment opportunities.

This is significant international activity. The access we have secured to important government and business leaders and influencers is the envy of many other administrations around the world. We now need to realise the potential of these relationships. To this end, we are finalising an International Relations Strategy and plan to share this with Executive colleagues shortly. Parallel to this, we have continued to develop our international priorities. In North America, Europe and Asia we have been proactive in raising our international profile and creating opportunities for trade, investment, tourism and skills development. We will continue this activity to support and promote economic growth.

Together: Building a United Community: Shared Campuses

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which areas are under consideration for the 10 shared campuses as part of their Together; Building a United Community strategy.
(AQW 24968/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A project design team is working on the implementation process of this commitment. We cannot pre-empt the work of the design team on the areas that may have a shared campus or the schools that may be involved. An announcement will be made in due course.

A5

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the High Court ruling on 8 April 2013, what discussions they have had with the Minister for Regional Development on the upgrade of the A5 road.
(AQO 3830/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following the High Court ruling we have had a number of discussions with the Minister for Regional Development on this issue. The Member will be aware of the Minister's statement of 15 April advising of his decision not to appeal the ruling and to initiate a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the scheme on the relevant Special Areas of Conservation. The Executive remains fully committed to the project and we are confident that all necessary assessments will be completed to get the A5 road project back on track.

UK City of Culture 2013: Project Director

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what role (i) their Department; and (ii) the Strategic Investment Board had in the secondment of Mr Dermot McLaughlin as Project Director of UK City of Culture 2013.
(AQW 25192/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials approved the Strategic Investment Board business case for the process to appoint a Programme Director on a direct appointment basis.

The Strategic Investment Board recruited Mr Dermot McLaughlin in October 2012 and seconded him to Derry City Council, where he was deployed as its City of Culture Programme Manager until his resignation.

Ilex

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, at the time of the appointment of Mr Matt McNulty as Acting Chair of ILEX, whether their Department was aware of the content of the Latitude Report, which covered his previous role with the Temple Bar Cultural Trust; and what regard was given to that report.
(AQW 25193/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Matt McNulty agreed to act as Chair on behalf of the Ilex Board on a temporary basis in March 2012. The Department was not aware of the Latitude report or its content.

UK City of Culture 2013: Project Director

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why, in the spring of 2013, only one Special Adviser was copied into departmental and Strategic Investment Board emails concerning the resignation of the Project Director of UK City of Culture; and to outline the policy on keeping Special Advisers of both parties informed.
(AQW 25273/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is standard practice within the Department and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to keep Special Advisers impartially informed on issues. Communication can be through a number of routes depending on circumstances and purpose.

In this case the e-mail was addressed to the lead official who would have communicated with both Private Offices.

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what audit has been conducted by, or on behalf of, the Victims and Survivor Service to establish success rates with 'hard to reach' victims.

(AQW 25657/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since opening, the Service has utilised a number of methods to try and reach out to victims and survivors with particular emphasis placed on trying to reach those who have not, for whatever reason, previously come forward to groups or the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund to seek help.

Presentations and conferences have been held with victims groups to make them aware of the schemes available for individuals with particular reference to the individual needs assessment used to determine an individually tailored package of assistance for each person.

Advertisements have been placed in local newspapers to introduce the Service and to note its website and the schemes available.

Information events have been held in Belfast and Dungannon.

Awareness of the Service has also been raised among statutory services.

OFMDFM: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many meetings have been held at (i) Ministerial level; and (ii) official level, with the corresponding Minister or Department (a) in the rest of the UK; and (b) in the Republic of Ireland since May 2007, either under the aegis of the North/South or East/West arrangements, or, otherwise.

(AQW 25838/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since 2007 there have been one hundred and forty six North South Ministerial Council meetings, including twelve in Plenary and seven in Institutional format, which have been attended by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

There have been twenty eight meetings under the aegis of the British Irish Council attended by Ministers, including twelve at Summit level.

We do not collate information on other bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC involving individual Ministers or officials.

Together: Building a United Community

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the delivery of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4593/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 23 May this year we published the new Good Relations Strategy, Together: Building a United Community.

For the 7 headline actions, design groups have been established to draw up detailed proposals for implementation and to develop projected costs. It is our intention that the plans and proposals that arise from these design groups are robust and can move to the implementation phase as soon as possible.

In addition to the 7 strategic headline actions, we are currently developing the other commitments identified in the Strategy to ensure that we deliver robust actions which will oversee a transformation in our society. There are around 35 additional actions and commitments. To take this work forward, a new United Community Division has been created in OFMDFM.

Implementation of all the actions and commitments will be overseen by a Ministerial Panel, made up of all Executive Ministers and chaired by us.

Sub-groups to the Ministerial Panel will also be established to implement specific actions arising from the Strategy.

Work is also underway to establish a new Equality and Good Relations Commission which will be an independent and statutorily-based organisation to provide advice, and challenge, to all levels of government in terms of improving good relations.

The Panel of Parties has now begun its work to consider parades and protests; flags, symbols and emblems, and related matters; and the past. The Panel is expected to conclude its work by December.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will produce the next action plan for the Ten Year Strategy For Children And Young People In Northern Ireland 2006-2016, given that the 2008-2011 Action Plan is now defunct.

(AQW 26266/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The current Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People is due to continue until 2016. Work to further the aims of the Strategy is now being taken forward through the Delivering Social Change framework which seeks to address the linked issues of poverty and improving children's lives. Through Delivering Social Change, we are moving away from plans with long lists of existing activities towards smaller numbers of cross-cutting and strategic objectives which are additional to existing work across government.

In support of this development, the Children and Young Persons Early Action document was published on 14 November 2012. This takes full account of the principles of the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People including its high level outcomes. It also identifies the key priorities for children and families over the remaining years of the Ten Year Strategy. The Early Action document identifies five priority work programmes focused on (i) early years and early intervention (ii) actions to improve children's early literacy and numeracy skills; (iii) support for services and interventions which protect and support young people through key life transitions; (iv) integrated service delivery (v) joined up planning and commissioning.

The document has been developed to assist key stakeholders in delivering further programmes and initiatives.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the 'Living in a society which represents their rights' indicator was omitted from the Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators update.

(AQW 26269/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Ten Year Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016 'Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge' sets out six high level outcomes against which the Strategy would deliver:

- Healthy
- Economic and environmental well-being
- Enjoying, learning and achieving
- Positive and valued contribution
- Safety and stability
- Living in a society which respects their rights

A set of strategic indicators was developed to measure delivery on the first five outcomes. As set out in the Strategy, the final outcome 'Living in a society which respects their rights' is central to the outcomes framework and delivery of the other five outcomes, for example, delivering improved health outcomes for children and young people would ultimately demonstrate government's intention to work towards a society which respects the rights of the child.

Planning Applications: North Down

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many planning applications in North Down are with the Planning Appeals Commission.

(AQW 26370/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its status, we have asked its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you.

United Youth: Stipend

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much the annual stipend will be for participants in the United Youth Programme.

(AQW 26441/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The process of designing the United Community Youth Programme is being taken forward by a design group specifically established to detail proposals and costs for implementation.

Until that work is completed no final decisions will be made on specific aspects of the Programme.

The design group is expected to conclude its work in the next few months and its report will inform Ministerial decisions on the way forward.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what indicators are used to monitor progress on the Children and Young People Strategy.

(AQW 26443/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People – Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge was published in 2006 and set out a shared vision that "all children and young people living in Northern Ireland will thrive and look forward with confidence to the future"

The Strategy identified six high level outcomes against which the Strategy would deliver for children and young people:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Healthy | ■ Positive and valued contribution |
| ■ Economic and environmental well-being | ■ Safety and stability |
| ■ Enjoying, learning and achieving | ■ Living in a society which respects their rights |

The Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators measure delivery against the first five outcomes and have been monitored annually since the publication of the Strategy in 2006. The latest update was published on 25 September 2013 and can be found at: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/commentary-cyp-strategic-indicators-2012-update-september-2013.pdf>

Social Investment Fund

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the delivery of the Social Investment Fund. (AQO 4655/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Strategic area plans were received by the Department on 28 February 2013. Each zone submitted economic appraisals for up to ten projects within their area plans. These are currently being considered as part of a comprehensive appraisal process.

Social Care: Legislation Review

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the expected timescale for the review by the Commissioner for Older People into the legislation underpinning the social care regime. (AQW 26605/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The research phase of the project will be completed and delivered by the Project Team based in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at Queen's University by March 2014, in accordance with the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland's 2013/14 Business Plan. In the three months to June 2014, the Commissioner will consider and may engage on the findings with Age NI and other key stakeholders.

Social Investment Fund: Social Enterprises

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an assessment of the performance of the Social Investment Fund in relation to social enterprises within local communities. (AQO 4649/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 28 February, the 9 Social Investment Fund Steering Groups submitted a total of 89 Projects in their plans for the zones.

The project proposals are now going through a quality assurance review. This will ensure that only the most robust projects and those that will have the most positive impact within their communities are recommended for funding.

Throughout this process our officials have had ongoing engagement with each of the Zones to ensure that their proposals meet the criteria as set out under the Social Investment Fund programme.

As the assessment process is ongoing, it is not possible to comment on the role that social enterprise will have in the delivery of the Fund's objectives.

Victims Support

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their Department's work with seriously injured victims of the Troubles, following historical failures and the real hurt caused by the Eames/Bradley report. (AQO 4657/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Over the next two years, £19.7m has been committed to support individual victims' needs. The Victims Support Programme, run by the Victims and Survivors Service, includes Health and Wellbeing, Social Support and Individual Needs.

The programme includes assistance specifically aimed at victims with serious injuries. This support covers a wide range of needs such as help with chronic pain and disability support. Each individual will have a package of assistance tailored to their own particular assessed requirements.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Wells asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the case load of the Planning Appeals Commission. (AQO 4650/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent Tribunal which operates at arm's length from Government and exercises its functions independently of our Department.

OFMDFM holds sponsorship responsibility for the Commission and provides the necessary resources to enable the Commission to meet its commitments. The overall operating budget provided to the Commission is £2,258,000 in the current year.

The Chief Commissioner is responsible for the day to day operation of the Commission and for deployment of its resources to meet the prevailing workload. Our Department has no locus in the Commission's workload scheduling or decision-making.

However, the Chief Commissioner has informed us that the work of the Planning Appeals Commission falls into 2 broad categories – appeals and referred work.

The appeals work involves making independent decisions on appeals against planning decisions made by Departments. The number of appeals in hand at 31 August 2013 was 157, which compares favourably with the 246 figure reported to the Member in reply to an Assembly Question to which we replied on 21 January 2013. This is a significant improvement on the backlog of over 3,000 cases at the end of December 2007.

More detailed information is available from the Commission should the Member require it.

Referred work relates to important cases referred to the Commission, including development plans and major planning applications under Article 31 of the Planning Order. This involves reporting back to Departments – principally the Department of the Environment – following a public inquiry or hearing. Final decisions on referred work are taken by the Departments concerned – again, mainly the Department of the Environment.

The Commission is currently progressing 8 major planning applications under Article 31 of the Planning Order and is preparing its report into the Public Examination of the Northern Area Plan which is programmed for completion at the end of 2013.

We continue to liaise closely with the Commission to ensure that it has the resources it requires to enable it to meet its prevailing workload.

Economic Pact

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they intend to utilise the opportunities afforded by the Economic Pact in the coming months.

(AQO 4658/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Economic Package 'Building a Prosperous and United Community' was announced on 14 June and ratified by the Executive on 27 June.

We welcome the pact which we believe will provide us with additional tools to rebalance our economy. Many of the measures in this Economic Pact complement the measures we are already taking to grow the local economy and to increase employment opportunities and prosperity for all.

There are a number of significant measures to note. We welcome the Government's clear commitment to take a decision on the devolution of Corporation Tax powers by autumn 2014. Officials are examining the actions that could be taken forward now, so that a devolved rate could be implemented as soon as possible after what, it is hoped, will be a positive decision in the autumn of 2014.

Opportunities will be provided by the additional resources which are being made available through additional EU funding and the increase in the RRI borrowing limit. The additional RRI borrowing will be used to help to support specific shared housing and education proposals for the benefit of our citizens.

We also welcome the commitment that all of the local economy will continue to enjoy Assisted Area Status post 2013. The outcome will be to help drive continued investment and business expansion in the local economy.

The commitment to establish a Joint Ministerial Taskforce is significant and it will examine whether tailored support is required for our local banks.

We welcome the UK Government's pledge to work together to improve the uptake of national schemes aimed at improving business access to finance in the local economy. This is critical for our economic recovery and rebalancing efforts.

The Irish Government has also pledged its support for the Pact and agreed to work with us to ensure it is fully implemented.

Programme for Government: Extension of Mandate

Mr G Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration is being given to extending the current Programme for Government, or bringing forward a new one, if the Assembly mandate goes past 2015.

(AQO 4654/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The current Programme for Government sets out a challenging agenda for delivery by the Executive in the period to 2015.

Through delivery against its commitments, the Executive has realised major economic and social benefits for people here – we are on track to deliver commitments to, for example:

- promote the creation of 25,000 new jobs;
- support £300 million investment in Research & Development;
- provide 200,000 qualifications to the working age population;
- increase the literacy and numeracy levels of all school leavers; and
- make free pre-school education available to every family that wants it.

The potential extension of the term of the current Assembly through the provisions of the legislation presently being considered at Westminster may, in due course, provide the opportunity to achieve further progress.

We are determined that, should this opportunity arise, we are positioned to take full advantage.

For this reason, we are making preparations for a PfG review, should it be required, which will include measures to tackle the economic and social issues that we still face, during the period of any extension of the mandate.

This work, presently underway, will position us to move swiftly to ensure continuity in Programme for Government delivery if and when a decision on the extension of the mandate is taken.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Construction Projects: West Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the current construction projects; and (ii) planned construction projects being undertaken by her Department in West Tyrone which will involve the use of Project Bank Accounts; and to explain how this approach will protect sub-contractors against possible risk of non-payment in the future. (AQW 26077/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department is currently undertaking one construction project in West Tyrone which will involve the use of a Project Bank Account. This is in relation to the construction of the Rivers Agency Regional Office in Omagh. DARD does not currently have any other planned construction projects in West Tyrone requiring the use of a Project Bank Account.

Project Bank Accounts were introduced by the Finance Minister in January 2013, now form part of the conditions for contracts with an estimated value of £1million and over and where there is a significant subcontracting element. The purpose of these bank accounts is to ensure that major first tier subcontractors working on a project will receive payment directly through a bank account specific to the project they are working on, rather than have to wait for main contractors to process their payment. The objective is to ensure that subcontractors working on Government projects receive payment within 5 days or less from the date the client deposits funds in the Project Bank Account. A further objective of such accounts is to help protect the subcontractor's money in the event of the contractor entering administration or receivership as the money is held in an account in trust for the supply chain.

Biocides

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in what circumstances is it legal to (i) own; (ii) sell; or (iii) use (a) Alphachloralose; (b) Carbofuran; (c) Strychnine; and (d) Paraquat.[R] (AQW 26095/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Biocidal products containing Alphachloralose as the active ingredient can be owned, sold or used subject to compliance with the conditions required under the biocides legislation. The conditions for biocidal products containing Alphachloralose include that they are only used in-doors and that their use is to control mice. The Health and Safety Executive is the lead authority for biocidal products.

Alphachloralose is not authorised for use as a plant protection product.

No products containing Carbofuran; Strychnine or Paraquat as active ingredients are currently authorised for plant protection or biocidal purposes. Plant protection product authorisations for Alphachloralose, Carbofuran, Strychnine and Paraquat expired on 31 December 2004, 31 Dec 2001, 31 Dec 2004 and 11 July 2008 respectively.

Animal Health and Welfare NI: Staff

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her departmental staffing costs, including the number of employees, associated with Animal Health and Welfare NI. (AQW 26097/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not have any dedicated full time staff working with AHWNI and their Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) voluntary programme, rather a percentage of 4 members of staff time is spent on production related diseases including BVD and the AHWNI project. Over the past year, the staffing costs for BVD and the AHWNI project, including the preparation of a consultation on a proposal to introduce legislation to make BVD testing compulsory is estimated to be approximately £21,000. There are also some Veterinary Service staff costs regarding attendance at meetings etc however these are negligible.

Animal Health and Welfare NI: Purchases

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an itemised breakdown of all items purchased by Animal Health and Welfare NI utilising the financial assistance provided by her Department. (AQW 26100/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has, through a Letter of Offer, made available £125,497 to support Animal Health and Welfare NI. This is to assist in the delivery of its Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme and with the development of a control programme for Johnes's disease between 4 March 2013 and 31 March 2014. The Letter of Offer provides support funding for the following:-

BVD Database	£24,523
Letters/SMS notifications	£ 2,769
Database maintenance	£ 2,904
Confirmatory tests	£4,983
Recruitment costs, Johnes's Expert	£7,935
Johnes's Programme Manager salary/costs	£50,217
Development Officer/Admin support	£20,725
Advertising/ Communication/Website	£4,499
Contingency	£6,942

My officials are currently assessing Animal Health and Welfare NI first claim but no payments have been made yet.

Animal Health and Welfare NI: Review

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the criteria used by her Department to measure mid-term reviews; and when a review of Animal Health and Welfare NI will take place.

(AQW 26102/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not have pre-set criteria for use in mid-term reviews rather when required each is developed specifically for the particular project. The mid-term review of the Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) project is scheduled to take place in March 2014 and will assess AHWNI's progress towards its objectives including consideration of the following:-

Item	DARD
Mid Term Review	DARD will complete in March 2014
AHWNI to introduce a voluntary BVD testing programme	31-Mar-13
AHWNI to develop and deliver a communication strategy for BVD eradication including the development of a web site;	31-Mar-13
AHWNI to attract 30% of the Northern Ireland annual calf crop (150,000 calves tagged and tested and results maintained on BVD Database) into the BVD testing programme and to ensure that Persistently Infected (PI) animals identified as a result are removed;	31-Dec-13
AHWNI to trial and test computer systems, testing procedures and test results reporting for the BVD testing Programme;	31-Dec-13
AHWNI to maintain the tissue Tag /database systems throughout 2014 and should the case be made for mandatory testing roll out a comms strategy and deal with queries arising from mandatory testing by 31 December 2013,	31-Dec-14
AHWNI to develop a national Johnes's Disease control programme by 31 Dec 2014	31-Dec-14

Councils: Dog Wardens

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, as of 1 April 2013, which councils have at least one dog warden in post.

(AQW 26133/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011, provides for the licensing of dogs by Councils and other related enforcement matters. Article 40(b) gives authority to Councils to appoint such number of officers as each Council considers necessary to exercise the powers conferred to its officers under the Order.

There is no requirement for Councils to supply my Department with information on the number of officers employed by them, and therefore my Department does not hold this information. However, Councils have advised my officials that, as of 1 April 2013, all 26 Councils have at least one dog warden in post.

I understand that a Council Dog Warden may not always be deployed full time on dog warden activities, as an officer's duties may include other Council enforcement roles.

Rural Development Programme: Livestock Marts

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the proposals for upgrading livestock marts to improve animal welfare and facilities for farmers through the utilisation of Rural Development Programme monies.

(AQW 26138/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding towards the improvement of infrastructure facilities at livestock markets is eligible under the EU Processing & Marketing Grant (PMG) Scheme, which is part of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

Since 2007, my Department has received and approved one funding application towards the construction of a new purpose built livestock market at Markethill, County Armagh.

The PMG Scheme closed on 20 September 2013. This was the last call for applications under the current Rural Development programme 2007-2013.

The type of future investments that will benefit from support under the next round of Rural Development 2014 - 2020 are currently under consideration and my Department is currently seeking views and comments from individuals and organisations on the proposed content of the RDP 2014-2020. The consultation process will close on Monday 21 October 2013.

Funding is not normally available to assist market operators in meeting minimum legal standards in relation to EU requirements, including animal health and welfare requirements. To date, my Department has not provided financial assistance to cattle markets to enable them to undertake their statutory obligations in relation to animal health and welfare, and I have no immediate plans to do so.

Stolen Livestock: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many incidents of stolen livestock have been reported in the North Down area, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 26141/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

	2011/2012	2012/2013
Number of incidents	66	88

The above table only records the number of incidents involving missing or stolen cattle in the Newtownards Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area. The whole of the North Down area is in the Newtownards DVO area.

APHIS does not differentiate between missing or stolen cattle. Information involving any other missing or stolen livestock is not recorded on APHIS at present.

APHIS does not record information on a constituency basis.

Animal Loss: North Down Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many claims for animal loss, due to the severe weather conditions, have been made in the North Down area, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 26142/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2013 there were two claims for animal loss in the North Down area following the heavy snow fall which took place on 22 and 23 March.

Livestock Loss: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the compensation paid to farmers who lost livestock due to heavy snowfall, in the North Down area, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 26144/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has provided funding to farmers who lost livestock due to the heavy snowfall, in the North Down area, as follows:

In financial year 2012/2013 there was no funding for this purpose.

In financial year 2013/2014 the Department assisted a very small number of farmers, in the North Down area, by way of the Agricultural (Hardship Payment) Scheme 2013, to a total value of £1215.00

Under protection afforded by the Data Protection Act I am obliged not to release the actual number as to do so may allow the individuals to be identified.

Farmers: North Down Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been awarded to farmers in the North Down area through departmental grants, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 26145/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has awarded grants of £343,549 in the 2012/13 financial year and £166,071 in the 2011/2012 financial year. Subsidy schemes are not included in these figures and some information is based on scheme year rather than financial year.

Farmers: Ceased Trading, North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have ceased trading in the North Down area, in the last two financial years.

(AQW 26147/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD does not hold information on the number of farmers that have ceased trading. However, APHIS does hold information on the number of livestock keeper registrations that have been made non-operational in the last two financial years.

	2011/2012	2012/2013
Number of herds or flocks made non-operational	178	123

The above table records the number of herds or flocks made non-operational in the Newtownards Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area. The whole of the North Down area is in the Newtownards DVO area.

APHIS does not record information on a constituency basis.

Ploughing Competition

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 25632/11-15, to detail the cost of attending and providing a stand at the Ploughing Competition in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 26156/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At this stage the costs for attendance at the 2013 National Ploughing Championships at Ratheniska, Co Laois have not been finalised. The estimated cost including staff costs will be around £31,000.

Likewise as the north of Ireland Ploughing Championships have yet to take place, a number of costs relating to the DARD exhibit and staffing costs have yet to be finalised.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of (i) the organic management option within the Countryside Management Scheme; and (ii) the application process for receiving support payments given that only six farmers are availing of this option.

(AQW 26212/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The Organic Management Option (OMO) is only available to NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) participants. To be eligible to avail of this option an NICMS farmer must have improved and/or semi-improved land which is fully converted to organic production and which remains certified as fully organic by a recognised organic sector certification body. This option provides encouragement to farmers to remain within the organic farming system beyond the end date of their five-year Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) agreement by providing funding to assist with certification and management costs associated with organic farming practices. Managing land under the OMO, without the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides contributes to scheme aims by helping to reduce water pollution and enhance biodiversity for a range of species and habitats on the farm. There are now five participants in NICMS who have availed of the OMO.
- (ii) Farmers who wished to take up the Organic Management Option (OMO) were offered the opportunity to do so at the time of application to the NICMS. Applications to NICMS are now closed. The OMO is one of thirteen Habitat Enhancement Options within NICMS and a separate application for the OMO was not required. The application process for NICMS was a paperless application process whereby the applicant supplied their Farm Business Identification number and the details of their leased land by telephone, e-mail, fax in writing or by calling in person at a DARD Office. The relatively low uptake of the option may be explained by the fact that the Organic Management Option within NICMS cannot be claimed in addition to Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) payments on the same land and only applies to improved land which is fully converted to organic and which remains certified as fully organic.

Organic Farmers: Assistance

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 18155/11-15, to detail the ongoing assistance her Department is providing to organic farmers.

(AQW 26215/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department currently provides financial support for farmers converting to organic production through the Organic Farming Scheme. The scheme compensates farmers for the additional costs associated with converting land to organic production methods. Payments range from £470 to £670 per hectare over 5 years, depending on land-type, and there are currently 37 farmers in the scheme.

Support is also provided for organic farmers through the Organic Management Option within the NI Countryside Management Scheme. This provides an annual support payment of £30 per hectare for organically certified land and there are currently 5 farmers availing of this option.

Both the Organic Farming Scheme and the Organic Management Option are currently closed to new applicants.

Furthermore, ongoing technical advice and training courses on organic production are available through CAFRE, where there is also an organic unit at Greenmount Campus. This unit is used to demonstrate best practice in organic farming to both agricultural students and organic farmers within the industry.

Rathlin Island: Fires

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance her Department has provided to landowners on Rathlin Island following the gorse fires in May 2013.

(AQW 26260/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date, my Department has not received any requests for management advice from landowners affected by gorse fires on Rathlin Island in May 2013. However my Department has previously issued advice that farmland damaged by wildfires should be allowed to regenerate naturally.

If as a result of this fire, land that was claimed as eligible for Single Farm Payment, Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowance or agri-environment purposes in 2013 is no longer eligible, the EU rules require the farm business involved to advise DARD, in writing, of the change in eligibility and the reasons for this within 10 days of being in a position to do so. This requirement is further explained in Section 11 of the 2013 "Guide on how to complete your 2013 Single Application and Field Data Sheet" booklet.

Ballykelly and Enniskillen: Staff Relocation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff in her Department that (i) have been relocated to new departmental headquarters in Ballykelly and Enniskillen; (ii) are still to be relocated; and (iii) will remain in Belfast or other locations.

(AQW 26263/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) As yet no members of staff have relocated to new Departmental headquarters in Ballykelly or Enniskillen. The headquarters of one post in Forest Service was moved to Enniskillen for operational reasons.
- (ii) The actual number to be relocated to new departmental headquarters has still to be decided. An exercise is underway to identify the phasing of areas of work which will in turn identify posts. In addition to the Ballykelly and Forest Service projects, the other relocation projects are Fisheries Division to South Down and Rivers Agency to Cookstown.
- (iii) The number of DARD staff who will remain in Belfast or other locations has yet to be decided and is part of ongoing considerations around the relocation of functions and posts. Furthermore, the level and extent of inter-Departmental moves to facilitate both DARD staff who do not wish to relocate and also those staff across other Departments who wish to avail of the opportunity to take up posts in the new locations will also assist in determining the number of DARD staff who will remain in Belfast or other locations.

Giant Hogweed

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what arrangements are in place to encourage land owners to deal with the problem of Giant Hogweed.

(AQW 26265/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Farmers in receipt of EU Area-based payments, such as Single Farm Payment, must follow Cross-Compliance rules. As part of Cross Compliance farmers are required to maintain their land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC).

One of the requirements of GAEC is "Undergrazing". Under this requirement farmers must prevent encroachment by invasive species on their agricultural area. Species such as rhododendron, giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam degrade the agricultural and environmental value of the land. Farmers, who are found to be in breach of Cross-

Compliance rules, may have penalties applied to their payments. In addition, agri-environment scheme participants who are managing riparian zones, along the margin of a waterway, must control invasive species such as giant hogweed. Penalties may be applied to a scheme payment if the management requirements are not followed.

To encourage the control of invasive species the NI Environment Agency (NIEA) through applications to its Natural Heritage Grant Programme and Water Quality Improvement Grant Scheme can provide funding to local community groups and environmental NGOs to take forward sustainable invasive species control projects. In recent years NIEA through these grant schemes have provided funding to several projects which included giant hogweed control. Examples of funded projects include The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) undertaking control along the Ballinmallard River in County Fermanagh and more recently providing funding to the River Blackwater Catchment Trust to undertake control along the River Blackwater.

In addition in 2011 the Department of Environment provided part funding towards a catchment scale InterReg IVA project, led by QUB, which is currently controlling a range of invasive species including giant hogweed in the Newry Canal, Clanrye River and River Faughan catchments.

To assist landowners in controlling giant hogweed both DARD and NIEA have developed best practice control guidance that is available online.

Information guidance on identifying and controlling giant hogweed may be found at the following link.

http://www.dardni.gov.uk/ruralni/giant_hogweed.pdf

Farm Takeovers: Herd Retention

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her Department cannot accommodate requests from a person, who is taking over a family farm, to retain the herd number held by their deceased father; and whether she plans to address this issue to permit some flexibility.

(AQW 26273/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This policy has been in place for over four years.

The herd or flock number is not the keeper's property, but merely a reference number used by DARD for administrative and disease control purposes. It is not a "herd" number, but rather a "keeper" registration number and, being person-related, is not transferable under the current administrative systems in the case where a sole registered keeper has died.

My staff have recently commenced a project to review the retention of herd/flock keeper registration when a sole registered herd or flock keeper dies. The project team will look at the processes involved and potential risks attached to these processes given our current IT systems.

Single Farm Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why local farmers are not in a position to avail of advanced payments for the 2013 Single Farm Payment; and to outline the actions she took over the last twelve months to rectify this.

(AQW 26294/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In order to make advance payments it is necessary that all administrative checks, including on the spot inspections are completed. Over the last twelve months, DARD has introduced significant changes to its validation and control systems, including the deployment of a new mapping system and ensuring its integration with on-the-spot inspections. It was not possible to complete these changes in time to allow advance payments in 2013.

As these changes bed in, this position will be rectified. I have increased use of control with remote sensing and promoted more online applications by farmers to help the Department complete its validation processes earlier and, in turn, increase the scope for advance payments in future years.

For this year, I am looking to pay as many farmers as possible early in December and I will be announcing a more detailed payment timetable in November.

Farm Businesses: Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Council Areas

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm businesses are in the (i) Ballymena Borough Council; (ii) Ballymoney Borough Council; and (iii) Moyle District Council areas.

(AQW 26339/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Table 1 provides a breakdown of Farm Businesses by Council Area where the post code is wholly within the Council Area.

Table 1

Ballymena	Ballymoney	Moyle	Total
2,499	1,303	972	4,774

Table 2 provides a breakdown of Farm Businesses where the post code straddles two Council Areas.

Table 2

Ballymena & Ballymoney	Moyle & Ballymoney	Total
74	57	131

Farming Community: Winter Conditions

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has in place to help the farming community deal with adverse winter conditions.

(AQW 26402/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware of the severe winter of 2012 and 2013 and the devastating impact that had on the farming community. You will also be aware of my Department's responses to the animal welfare issue and hardship incurred.

As a result of the severe weather I set up the Fodder Taskforce which is a joint Government and industry group which has identified a wide range of issues affecting farmers as a result of unfavourable weather conditions in the first half of 2013.

The Taskforce publicised its action plan in July 2013 which included actions that both my Department and the Industry can do to avoid similar issues to those of last winter. My Department through its CAFRE Development Advisers provided good advice on grass management and fodder management to ensure that farmers are well prepared for any prolonged bad weather during the coming months.

I will be monitoring the situation and if required I will ask the Taskforce to meet earlier should the need arise during the forthcoming winter.

The farming community as well as all other rural and urban dwellers in the north have a responsibility to ensure they prepare for the winter months to minimise any problems that may occur. Simple actions such as checking water pipes are lagged can minimise the potential of frozen pipes and reduce the risk of flooding.

Farm Safety Partnership

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the work of the Farm Safety Partnership since the publication of its Action Plan in November 2012, including the number of (i) meetings held; (ii) farmers who have undertaken Farm Safe Awareness courses; and (iii) training events and workshops which the Development Advisers from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise have distributed health and safety information to farmers.

(AQW 26416/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware that the Farm Safety Partnership was set up in response to the worsening situation in relation to fatalities on farms. The Farm Safety Partnership was established in May 2012 between the Health & Safety Executive NI, DARD and the Ulster Farmers Union. Since then the Partnership has also been joined by NFU Mutual, the Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster and NIAPA.

The aim of this Partnership is to improve health and safety standards on farms and strive to significantly reduce work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses. The Farm Safety Partnership developed an Action Plan that sets out its priorities and objectives over 18 months ending March 2014. This was launched at Ravenhill Rugby Ground on 27 November 2012.

The action plan sets out a clear strategy aimed at reducing injury and deaths on farms and includes details of specific goals and targets. The main thrust of the plan is to raise farm safety awareness and change farmers' attitude to risk through a wide range of training events, farmers meetings, open days, demonstrations, focus farm events and farm business mentoring sessions. The Action Plan contains 44 commitments of which my Department has lead responsibility for 7.

The Partnership is making excellent progress implementing this action plan and promotes the farm safe message at every opportunity including the Multi Media campaign that is currently running, the PTO week starting 23 September 2013 and a presence at many agricultural shows and events including Balmoral Show.

I am aware that the Partnership is now making plans to review the outcomes of its Action Plan and will be reporting on these in due course.

The Farm Safety Partnership has held 4 meetings and the Partnership's steering group has held 4 meetings since its action plan was launched on November 2012. Each of the Partnership's 4 working groups meet regularly in relation the targets they are assigned.

To date 1062 farmers (including members of their families) have undertaken Farm Safe Awareness courses. The average attendance is 14 people. A further 30 scheduled sessions have been organised between October 2013 and January 2014.

CAFRE Development Advisers have distributed health and safety material at 257 training events and workshops where there were attended by 8,587 people. Farm Safety is also in integral part of the course work in all of the CAFRE colleges and students gain first hand demonstrations of proper procedures and practices that ensure farm safety.

Farm Safety Partnership: Financial Assistance

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she expects to receive the report from the Farm Safety Partnership on the potential for financial assistance to farmers to promote improved health and safety on farms.
(AQW 26418/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Farm Safety Partnership launched its Action Plan in November 2012 and set out a number of actions to be completed by March 2014. The Partnership does not provide a report on its individual actions but is about to start a review of the outcomes of the actions and will report on its Action Plan when the review is complete.

Action 3.2 of the Action Plan is "Explore the potential for financial assistance to farmers to promote improved health and safety on farms." This action point is recorded against my Department to lead on and my officials have carefully considered funding streams that can be used to promote improved health and safety.

Safety equipment is clearly only a part of the solution in creating a safer working environment for farmers and their families. The recent tragic events only confirm that Health and Safety practices must be incorporated into the day to day activities of the entire farm family, leading to real improvements in behaviours and attitudes to risky practices.

The current FarmSafe Awareness training is funded under the Rural Development Programme. In addition, the issue of health and safety on farms is being raised with farm families through a number of other DARD programmes and at various DARD events. Within the Rural Development Programme, on-farm health and safety risks are being highlighted at Focus Farm training visits and at Farm Family Options Business Mentoring sessions. My Department is also distributing advisory leaflets prepared by HSENI and allocating space for HSENI display at the large scale CAFRE events. CAFRE is also providing an appropriate Health and Safety presentation to students at the colleges and my Department has also made the FarmSafe presentation available to HSENI for delivery to farmers.

Over the three Tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme some £4.2m of financial support for safety-related items has been awarded in Letters of Offer to successful applicants.

I also announced during the Assembly debate on 30 September 2013 that I am planning to extend the current tranche of the Farm Modernisation Programme, subject to receiving the necessary funding and approvals. This will provide financial support for those farm businesses that applied but just missed out under the first allocation earlier this year of Tranche 3 funding. It will provide these applicants with an opportunity to access grant aid for items to help modernise their farms including a range of items that promote safer working practices on farms. When funding and the necessary approvals have been secured I will make a formal announcement on the extension.

The Consultation period for the next Rural Development Programme is currently open and due to close on 21 October, and I have asked individuals and organisations to submit their views on the proposed health and safety content for the new programme. I have also asked officials to develop proposals for a scheme that would support larger capital investment to improve health and safety.

Reservoirs and Quarries: Safety

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussion her Department has had with the Department of the Environment on ensuring the safety of reservoirs and quarries.
(AQW 26459/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Officials from my Department have engaged with their counterparts in the Department of the Environment throughout the policy development and consultation stages of the proposed Reservoir Bill. This legislation will enable assurance to be provided that the risk of flooding due to an uncontrolled release of water as a result of a dam failure is being appropriately managed and will therefore ensure the safety of those who live and work in the potential downstream inundation areas. These engagements have been primarily concerned with environmental and cultural heritage matters as the protection of these sites from reservoir flooding will influence the risk designation that will be applied to a reservoir. There has also been significant discussion with the DOE Officials involved in the revision of Planning Policy Statement (PPS)15 to ensure it adequately addresses the risk of development in the potential flood inundation areas of reservoirs. My officials have had no discussion with DOE on the safety of quarries as this is outside the remit of my Department.

Departmental Land: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) amount; and (ii) location of departmental owned/controlled land in South Down.
(AQW 26462/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My department owns or controls approximately 4,442 hectares of land in South Down. Each location is detailed in the table below. All of the land is managed by the Forest Service.

Table - Owned and Controlled land in South Down

Location	Amount (Hectares)
Annalong Forest, Annalong, Newcastle	303.41

Location	Amount (Hectares)
Bohill Forest, Loughinisland, Ballynahinch	90.42
Castleward Forest, Strangford, Downpatrick	75.31
Castlewellan Forest, Castlewellan, Newcastle	637.80
Donard Forest, Bryansford, Newcastle	296.22
Drumkerragh Forest, near Ballynahinch	200.28
Hollymount Forest, Annacloy, Downpatrick	110.95
Mourne Forest, Attical, Killeel	270.87
Narrow Water Forest, Burren, Warrenpoint	138.41
Rostrevor Forest, Warrenpoint	1,676.39
Tollymore Forest, Bryansford, Newcastle	642.05
Total Owned/Controlled Land	4,442.11

Headquarters: Consultation Response

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 25403/11-15, how many of the respondents were from a corporate body, and how many from the North West branch of a corporate body.

(AQW 26465/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Of the 24 responses received 17 were from corporate bodies. The remaining 7 were from individuals, all of whom are elected representatives.

All of the responses provided by corporate bodies were on behalf of their respective HQs/head offices and not North West branches only.

Electricity: Small-scale Generation

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, of the applicants who received Rural Development funding for small scale generation, to detail the number that were issued a conditional letter of offer from Northern Ireland Electricity which is insufficient to allow them to progress with their project.

(AQW 26551/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No such applicants have confirmed that they are unable to progress with their projects.

Rural Development Programme: Unspent Moneys

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether unspent monies within the Rural Development Programme will be redirected to other projects or refunded.

(AQW 26552/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Any unspent monies within the Rural Development Programme are allocated against projected expenditure to the end of the Programme. My officials will continue to monitor the programme's expenditure and make any further adjustments, as permitted within programme rules, to ensure the drawdown of funds is maximised.

Electricity: Small-scale Generation

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the current difficulties faced by small scale generation projects, what level of flexibility there is on the deadline for the Rural Development Funding Capital Spend for generation projects.

(AQW 26553/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Operating Rules for Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme state that: 'All payments of grant assistance under the programme must be made by 31 December 2014. A Letter of Offer must not issue with a final project completion date later than 30 September 2014'.

All seven Rural Development Programme Joint Council Committees responsible for delivery have confirmed with the Department they will spend their full Axis 3 funding allocation within the programme period.

Electricity: Small-scale Generation

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much Rural Development Funding will be lost as a result of applicants being unable to connect to the national grid for small scale generation projects.

(AQW 26554/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All seven Rural Development Programme Joint Council Committees have confirmed with the Department they will spend their full Axis 3 funding allocation within the programme period.

Flood Protection: Property-level Scheme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there are plans to introduce a property-level flood protection scheme.

(AQW 26576/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of the ongoing work of my Department to implement the EU Floods Directive, I have asked that the possibility of a property-level flood protection programme be explored. Rivers Agency is currently scoping the options for such a scheme, with cooperation from the other departments on the Floods Directive Steering Group, and I expect to receive the completed business case soon. I am pleased to tell you that initial analysis looks positive, and I hope to be able to make a public statement on the way forward toward the end of this year.

Pork: China Export

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of her recent visit, to detail the progress made on applications for the export of pork to China.

(AQW 26691/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I was recently invited to deliver a key-note at the 4th Sino-European Agricultural Conference. Whilst in China I took the opportunity to request a meeting to discuss progress on the applications for the export of pork to China. I am happy to report that I had a meeting with CNCA government officials on September 24th in Beijing. During the meeting, senior CNCA officials advised me that they will consider the north of Ireland applications before November 2013, which is earlier than originally indicated.

Agri-food Industry: China Visit

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the benefits to be gained by the agri-food industry following her recent visit to China.

(AQW 26692/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are several key benefits to be gained by the local agri-food industry following my recent visit. Firstly during my key-note speech at the Sino European Agricultural Conference and I used the opportunity to make the conference delegates aware of our global reputation for high standards of traceability, safety and wholesomeness of our agri products.

Secondly, I also met with Vice President Li Jianping of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries in Beijing to cultivate and enhance this strategic relationship between the north of Ireland and China. As you are aware building relationships is key to developing business links in China.

Finally I met with officials from the registration department responsible for approving our applications for the export of pork. I was pleased to hear that they will consider our application for the export of pork products sooner than we had previously been advised.

The overall strategic objective for my visit to China was to enhance the north of Ireland-China relationship and foster opportunities for gain for the north of Ireland in the agri-product and agri-food sector. The First and deputy First Minister began this relationship at the invitation of the Chinese Government and I am happy to continue to build on the relationships I made during my last visit in November 2012.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Kick-boxers

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding available to support local kick boxers.

(AQW 26182/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, has advised that there is no funding currently available to support local kick boxers.

Sport NI is supporting Kickboxing as they progress through a process to be recognised as a sport, with Kickboxing Ireland applying to become the recognised governing body for local kick boxers. On completion of this process, Sport NI will be able to advise kickboxing on the next steps and / or opportunities available to local kick boxers.

Sport: Fermanagh, South Tyrone and West Tyrone

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding offers made for sports or partial sports facilities in the constituencies of (i) Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and (ii) West Tyrone, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26411/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, has provided total Exchequer funding of £5,620,921 for sports or partial sports facilities in Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and, West Tyrone in the last five years up to 31 March 2013 as detailed below.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Total
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	633,975	1,649,020	231,078	480,667	50,000	3,044,740
West Tyrone	1,125,669	1,303,057	147,455	-	-	2,576,181

Libraries: Ballymena; Kells and Connor; Ballycastle; Broughshane

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of members of (i) Ballymena; (ii) Kells and Connor; (iii) Ballycastle; and (iv) Broughshane libraries, in each of the last four years.

(AQW 26613/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The number of active members for (i) Ballymena; (ii) Kells and Connor; (iii) Ballycastle; and (iv) Broughshane libraries, in each of the last four years is as follows:

Branch	01-Apr-2010	01-Apr-2011	01-Apr-2012	01-Apr-2013
(i) Ballymena Library	8,108	7,070	7,471	7,406
(ii) Kells and Connor Library	546	582	661	666
(iii) Ballycastle Library	2,010	1,748	2,046	1,998
(iv) Broughshane Library	829	786	777	744

Libraries: Rural Communities

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the value of rural libraries as an educational and social asset to rural communities.

(AQW 26674/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I recognise the importance and value of rural libraries as both educational and social assets. Rural libraries are more than just a place for borrowing books, important though that is. They are a public resource which can contribute significantly to the quality of life for the people they serve as they are often seen as a community hub and a place of safety and neutrality.

Rural libraries provide people with an opportunity to: contribute to lifelong learning, foster good relations with their neighbours; and facilitating the development of informed and responsible citizenship. They also provide a location for targeted outreach interventions that seek to tackle social exclusion and inequality in our society.

With 28 of Libraries NI's 96 branches located in rural areas these libraries serve areas where poverty is often hidden. The use of mobile libraries and the Home Call service further supports our rural library network.

Libraries: Rural

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, taking into account the work done by the local communities, such as in Kells and Connor, to increase the use of libraries, what additional resources her Department can make available to LibrariesNI specifically to support rural libraries.

(AQW 26676/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I recognise the strenuous efforts that local communities such as Kells and Connor have been making to halt declining use of their libraries. The recent opening of a relocated library in Draperstown provides an example where the determination and foresight of individuals has brought a positive change to the community.

I was pleased earlier this year to make an additional £97k available for two Libraries NI projects which will help to increase the support to rural communities: The 'library in a box' pilot scheme, which seeks to provide access to borrowing services in communities with no library, and for an extension to the successful 'Health in Mind' project. A new library build at Lisnaskea will also be supported with an additional £800k of Departmental funding.

Aside from these additional funds, the Board and Senior Management of Libraries NI will continue to allocate their existing resources to the areas of the public library service where they are needed most, including support for rural libraries.

Libraries: Rural

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has made any approaches to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to seek support for rural libraries.

(AQW 26677/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Officials both within my Department and Libraries NI are actively working in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to help support rural libraries.

In response to the Executive's Rural White Paper a joint Working Group has identified a number of rural issues which libraries can help address. These include: access to broadband, access to information, developing ICT skills (particularly within the elderly and farming communities) and addressing mental health issues.

This partnership approach has been designed both to make rural communities more aware of the free services which are available, and to help increase support for rural libraries in danger of closure. Examples of this successful working arrangement with DARD include:

- The expansion of the highly successful the 'Health in Mind' awareness programme.
- 30,000 farmers received Single Farm Payments information packs which included information on the availability of free internet access in libraries and the training support that library staff were pleased to provide.
- Targeted marketing of free IT services to both individuals and rural businesses which enable the completion of on-line grant and benefit forms.
- Mobile libraries have been taken to a number of Agricultural Shows to promote library services to rural communities.

I would also draw your attention to the successful partnership between Libraries NI, DARD and the Big Lottery Fund that led to the re-location of the new library at Draperstown. This was listed for closure but is now a thriving community hub which is now attracting new users and providing an expanded programme of activities and initiatives.

Culture Night

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department supported the various Culture Nights that took place on 20 September 2013.

(AQO 4713/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The various Culture Nights that took place on 20 September 2013 across the north were organised and operated by a mixture of private organisations and local Councils. My Department, through the Arts Council NI, provided £24,250 in funding to the Cathedral Quarter Trust for the Culture Night in Belfast. Culture Nights held outside Belfast were funded by the relevant local Council.

Although I am unable to comment on the success of Culture Nights outside Belfast and no definitive figures are yet available for Culture Night Belfast, I am advised that initial reports suggest that the Belfast event was a huge success. Early estimates suggest that 42,000 people came out across Belfast to enjoy the biggest Culture Night to date. The high attendance figures provide an excellent indicator of the interest in and willingness to support the local arts scene in Belfast, and also of the arts sector's potential to contribute to the development of a diverse and dynamic culture within the city.

The Culture Nights have now become a staple part of the wide ranging cultural offerings supported by my Department, which included activities such as the Belfast Pride in July and the All Ireland Fleadh in August. Both of these events attracted huge numbers of spectators and participants, and provided something for everyone to enjoy and engage with.

Irish Language

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she intends to enhance and protect the long-term development of the Irish language.

(AQO 4714/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In line with the 2011-2015 Programme for Government, I will be bringing forward to the Executive a Strategy for Enhancing and Protecting the Development of the Irish language.

The Strategy has been strengthened following a comprehensive public consultation exercise and has also been informed by engagement with other Executive Ministers. The crucial role of Irish language stakeholders and the community has been more fully reflected in the Strategy.

The Strategy sets out a framework for the next 20 years in areas such as public services, education, the home and community, the media and economic life to enhance, protect and develop the Irish language.

Following Executive agreement, a Strategy Delivery Group will progress the Strategy by agreeing detailed action plans with Departments.

Initiatives such as the Líofoa campaign, the Belfast Gaeltacht Quarter and Irish Language Academy will also contribute to enhancing and developing the Irish language.

I remain committed to bringing forward to the Executive legislative proposals for an Irish language Act which experience elsewhere suggests is an effective to protecting the language.

Stadia: Development

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the social benefits from the 3 stadia development will support the construction industry.

(AQO 4715/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Social Clauses are a Programme for Government commitment with a requirement to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction.

My Department are committed to embedding social clauses at the heart of all procurement contracts and the Stadium Programme is an excellent example of how such clauses can be used to derive maximum gains for those facing social and economic disadvantage.

The Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park investments will result in contract works over £115m which will be a real driver for job retention and creation with a minimum of 2,276 job years of work generated by the three projects.

Within these construction contracts, 70 opportunities for the long term unemployed and 39 apprenticeships will be generated. Each of the contractors appointed are also required to deliver 5 socio-economic proposals for local communities in the areas around the stadium sites.

In addition, contractors will develop skills in relation to working with those sectors facing the greatest inequalities within areas of greatest objective need. Contractors will gain experience of working with local communities around employment of long-term unemployed and apprenticeships, which will undoubtedly improve the contractor's ability to tender for future works containing social clauses as award criteria.

Culture Night

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the recent Culture Night in Belfast.

(AQO 4717/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The various Culture Nights that took place on 20 September 2013 across the north were organised and operated by a mixture of private organisations and local Councils. My Department, through the Arts Council NI, provided £24,250 in funding to the Cathedral Quarter Trust for the Culture Night in Belfast. Culture Nights held outside Belfast were funded by the relevant local Council.

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The Culture Nights have now become a staple part of the wide ranging cultural offerings supported by my Department, which included activities such as the Belfast Pride in July and the All Ireland Fleadh in August. Both of these events attracted huge numbers of spectators and participants, and provided something for everyone to enjoy and engage with.

UK City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that it is now the last quarter of the 2013 City of Culture programme, for an update on the Legacy Plan for the city.

(AQO 4718/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Whilst the official City of Culture year may end in December, Derry will remain a centre for cultural activity. We will ensure that the work done in 2013 continues to be built on to leave a lasting legacy.

To this end, Derry City Council has submitted a draft Legacy Plan to DCAL for consideration. DCAL Officials will continue to work with the Council and Culture Company in the coming weeks to further refine proposals on structures and actions in relation to Legacy.

I also recently announced that I have set aside funding for a very special project which will retain some of the Lumiere magic in Rosemount. Subject to the necessary planning approvals, the project would see an illuminated sign located in the heart of the community, on top of the Rosemount Factory. The sign will celebrate the cultural identity of the community, embodying the new cultural strategy for the Outer West area. Its location has been deliberately selected to shift the focus of cultural provision from the City centre to the communities surrounding it.

Department of Education

Hollywood: New School Buildings

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of new school buildings for (i) Hollywood Nursery School; (ii) Hollywood Primary School; and (iii) Priory Integrated College.
(AQW 25784/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The South Eastern Education & Library Board identified a multi-schools project for Hollywood as one of its top three priorities for major capital investment. However the project was not included in my January 2013 announcement due to the need for clarity on enrolments at Priory Integrated College and the potential to increase these above sustainable schools thresholds, as well as the potential for alliances with other secondary schools in relation to 6th form provision.

On 16 April 2013, the South Eastern Education and Library Board published a Development Proposal proposing that the approved enrolment at Priory College, Hollywood should increase from 450 to 600 with effect from 31 August 2014 or as soon as possible thereafter. Officials are currently compiling the available information and I expect to take a decision on this in the near future.

While Hollywood Primary / Hollywood Nursery / Priory Integrated College will be disappointed that they were not included in the capital investment announcement in January 2013, this in no way implies that they will not be considered for funding at a later stage within the on-going area planning process.

Strategic Funding Panels: Membership

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25286/11-15, to list the membership of the strategic funding panels.
(AQW 25907/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The strategic funding panels comprise representatives from various stakeholder groups. In relation to the panels convened to discuss the DE Early Years Fund in 2013/14, the bodies which were represented were:

Western Childcare Partnership (CCP) Assessment Panel - completed 7 June 2013

- Early Years
- Western Childcare Partnership
- ALTRAM (Chairperson)
- Western Education and Library Board
- NICIE

Southern CCP Assessment Panel - completed 18 June 2013

- Early Years
- Southern Childcare Partnership
- Homestart
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust
- Orana Children's & Family Centre

Belfast /South Eastern CCP Assessment Panel - completed 28 June 2013

- Belfast & S.E Childcare Partnership
- Early Years
- Scoil na Fuisseoige
- The Ashton Centre
- Belfast Trust

Northern CCP Assessment Panel - completed 28 June 2013

- Northern Childcare Partnership
- Early Years
- NICMA
- Playboard

Gaisce Award

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education what his Department is doing to promote the benefits of participating in the Gaisce Awards programme.
(AQW 26090/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education delegates funding and decision-making in relation to programmes they may use to schools and youth clubs who are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils or members. It is therefore for schools and Youth Clubs to decide whether or not a programme provided by an external body might enhance their formal or non-formal education experience.

Accordingly, the Department does not endorse, promote or recommend such resources or programmes. However, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award works closely with Gaisce - The President's Award within the terms of the Joint Award Initiative Agreement whereby young people from the North of Ireland may choose upon completion of the Programme to have the Gaisce Award presented.

In order to promote the Joint Award Initiative, the main documentation for participants - the Joint Award Initiative Welcome packs, clearly identify Gaisce - The President's Award as a partner and includes detailed information about the choice of certification available to young people.

The availability of the Joint Award Initiative is promoted widely by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Programme at every opportunity, including leader/supervision/expedition assessor training courses. The Duke of Edinburgh Awards and Gaisce-the President's Award are currently developing plans to recruit a Development Officer to increase participation among young people and, in particular, to further promote the choice of certification available under the Joint Award Initiative.

Schools: Sale of Closed Buildings

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education to list the school buildings that have closed in the past three years and subsequently sold; and to detail the total net proceeds of the sales.

(AQW 26109/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A list of the School buildings that have closed in the last three years and subsequently sold, along with detail of the net proceeds, are listed below.

School	Net Proceeds (£000's)
Ballee Primary School (Building Demolished)	61
Bangor Grammar School (College Avenue)	1,178
Clogher Regional Primary School	69
Former Tor Bank Special School	995
Grove Primary School, Belfast (buildings demolished)	116

Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education how the new build proposals for the replacement of the Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore are being advanced.

(AQW 26126/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been no further developments since my last response to you in April this year. A major capital works project for Dean Maguirc College is one of a large number of proposals currently with the Department. There are a number of site and planning issues still to be resolved around the plans for a new build for the school.

I met with local representatives in August to review the need for a new build for Dean Maguirc College and will continue to examine the case for capital investment for the school together with other new build propositions as part of any future announcement. If the precise nature of any capital works required at the existing school is determined, a bid could be made through the Schools Enhancement Programme.

Teachers: Substitute Register

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education how many people on the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register are currently employed on a permanent basis.

(AQW 26157/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No teachers on the Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) are employed on a permanent basis, as they are employed on temporary contracts to cover absent teachers. Teachers seeking employment through NISTR can be offered periods of employment from as short as half a day's work to longer periods involving a fixed term contract of several months, where it is known that longer term cover is required from the outset, due to a secondment for example. The majority of appointments are for shorter periods of days or weeks to meet the needs of schools.

Capital Works and Refurbishment Projects: Product Specification

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education, in relation to capital works and refurbishment projects, whether a school, architect, electrical or mechanical consultant, can specify, within the specification or employer's requirements, a brand of products to be used; and whether a proposed equal alternative product would be accepted.

(AQW 26163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the education sector, the Contracting Authority will be either a school (e.g. voluntary sector) or an Education & Library Board (e.g. controlled sector). The Contracting Authority, or consultants acting on its behalf, procuring goods, works and services, is governed by The Public Contract Regulations 2006. Regulation 9 states that: '...a contracting authority shall not lay down technical specifications in the contract documents which refer to— (a) materials or goods of a specific make or source or to a particular process; or (b) trademarks, patents, types, origin or means of production; which have the effect of favouring or eliminating particular economic operators' [Reg 9 (16)].

In addition, '...exceptionally, a contracting authority may incorporate the references referred to in paragraph (16) into the technical specifications in the contract documents, provided that the references are accompanied by the words 'or equivalent', where—(a) the subject of the contract makes the use of such references indispensable; or (b) the subject of the contract cannot otherwise be described by reference to technical specifications which are sufficiently precise and intelligible to all economic operators' [Reg 9 (17)].

Therefore, generic specification of products should be the norm for public procurement policy. If however, a Contracting Authority in the education sector or its consultant believes that a particular circumstance satisfies the restrictive requirements of the Regulation, they must be able to robustly defend their position if challenged.

Schools: Common Funding Scheme

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the financial impact of the proposed Common Funding Scheme on schools in the district electoral areas of (i) Carrickfergus; (ii) Antrim; and (iii) Newtownabbey.

(AQW 26203/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The illustrative budgets prepared for schools as part of the current Common Funding Scheme (CFS) consultation exercise reflect what schools would have received in the current year if all the proposed changes had applied. The figures are based on this year's enrolment numbers, free school meals entitlement and Aggregated Schools' Budget (plus the additional £10m for social deprivation). The ASB for next year will increase by an additional £15.8m which is not included in these figures.

My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals yet.

It is not possible therefore to provide figures, or an assessment, on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year, until these decisions are made. In addition, other factors, such as the increased Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) for next year, overall enrolment levels, the number of Free School Meal Entitled pupils, and the number of Newcomer and Traveller pupils etc will impact on funding levels at individual school level.

The report of the independent review panel highlighted the relationship between social deprivation and low educational outcomes and recommended that more funding should be targeted at pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and that this funding should be weighted towards schools with significant concentrations of disadvantage.

The consultation period closes on 18 October and I would encourage everyone with an interest in education to take part in the debate. I will take all responses into account before I make my final decisions on the way ahead.

A Levels: Progress from AS Level

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education (i) how many students enrolled in year 13 for AS levels; (ii) how many of that cohort then progressed to do A-levels; (iii) how many studied for three A-levels; (iv) how many achieved three A-levels at Grade A* to E; (v) how many achieved two A-levels at Grade A* to E; and (vi) how many achieved one A-level at Grade A* to E, broken down by school, in each of the last five academic years.

(AQW 26209/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The data is not available in the format requested.

The 'Schools+' database available on the Department of Education website provides the year group enrolment data for the most recent 5 years for each school, sourced from the Annual School Census, and examination achievement data for those pupils in the final year of an A level or equivalent course of study, for the most recent 4 years, for each post primary school, sourced from the Summary of Annual Examination Results. <http://apps.deni.gov.uk/appinstitutes/instmain.aspx>

Free School Meals: Breakfast

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25578/11-15, whether his Department has undertaken research into whether breakfast might be a more beneficial meal to provide to children.

(AQW 26240/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The consumption of a well-balanced meal can make an important contribution to a child's nutrition and health in addition to the associated impacts on behaviour, concentration and cognitive development. The Department recognises that all children should eat three regular meals per day – breakfast, lunch and the evening meal.

The Department has not undertaken research on the benefits of free school meals provided at mid-day in comparison to breakfasts and is not aware of research of this nature having been undertaken in Scotland, Wales or the South of Ireland. Officials in the Department for Education (England) have also confirmed that they have not undertaken a direct comparison in this regard.

Expert advice indicates, however, that in a school setting, the lunch menu can provide a wider variety and complexity of food compared to breakfast which helps towards meeting children's daily nutrient and energy requirements.

Consequently, the Department requires that the Education and Library Boards and schools ensure that in providing free school meals these must be "suitable as the main meal of the day" (as set out in the Department's "Arrangements for the Provision of Milk, Meals and Related Facilities") and must comply with the Nutritional Standards for School Meals.

I consider that this approach will help ensure that the direct and wider benefits of nutritious free school meals to pupils from low income households are realised.

I will continue to review any new or emerging evidence on the benefits of food provided in school to inform future Departmental policy interventions in this regard.

Schools: Child Protection

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what consideration his Department has given to updating Circular 9/99 Pastoral Care in Schools – Child Protection, which outlines schools responsibility in communicating child protection matters. (AQW 26243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A revision of Circular 1999/10 is under active consideration. The revision will update and expand the content and also change the format to be web-based. Any revised version must be compatible with the key children's safeguarding policy guidance, 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children'. This overarching policy framework for all relevant Departments is maintained by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and is currently being revised. The new version is to be published in March 2015 after a period of consultation.

The same target will be used for the launch of a revised version of Circular 1999/10.

The guidance set out in Circular 1999/10 for schools to use is still valid. This has been supplemented since 1999 by further Circulars on various aspects of child protection and with letters of advice on related topics.

Since 1999 the Child Protection Support Service for Schools has been established and a structured approach to child protection training for key schools' staff has been implemented. All newly appointed principals, designated teachers and deputy designated teachers for child protection are offered training in their first year in post and refresher training every third year thereafter. The actual content of the training is kept under continuous review and updated to accommodate any relevant developments, such as child sexual exploitation.

STEM: Engineering Skills and Demand in Industry Report

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education, given that the Institution of Engineering and Technology's Engineering Skills and Demand in Industry Report 2013 revealed that just 7% of the engineering and technology workforce was female, what his Department is doing to promote the uptake of STEM subjects amongst female pupils. (AQW 26249/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The promotion of STEM subjects is one of the Department's priorities and we are currently supporting a number of programmes to promote the uptake in STEM subjects.

Sentinus, the Department's front line STEM delivery partner, delivers in excess of 57,000 primary and post-primary pupil engagements annually across a portfolio of STEM enhancement and enrichment programmes. One of the targets set annually by the Department requires Sentinus to ensure a gender balance within a tolerance of +/- 5% across all DE funded programmes.

Sentinus has achieved this target in each of the last four years (2009/10 – 2012/13) with a maximum gender variance of +/-2%.

Since 2007/08 the gender breakdown of the total A-Level STEM examination entries has remained within a tolerance of +/- 5%.

Non-teaching Staff: Payments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the payment of £250 to non-teaching staff who earn less than £21,000 per year; and whether any payments from previous years remain outstanding. (AQW 26295/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The £250 payments have been made to the majority of eligible staff. Staff across the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Sectors eligible for the payment but yet to receive it, will do so as soon as the necessary approvals are in place. I have instructed my officials to progress this work as a matter of urgency.

Irish Medium Sector

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what assessment has been carried out of the efficiency savings which could be made within the Irish Medium Education sector.

(AQW 26301/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools across all sectors are expected to manage their delegated budgets efficiently and effectively and the Irish Medium sector is no different in that regard to any other sector.

In line with its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education, the Department provides funding to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. Again in common with other executive non-departmental bodies it is required to deliver its functions in a manner that delivers value for money.

I am committed to ensuring that the education budget is effectively disbursed and used in a manner that delivers value for money. It is not, however, my approach to target one particular sector.

Free School Meals

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how many children receive free school meals, broken down by the (i) Catholic Maintained; (ii) Controlled; (iii) Integrated; and (iv) Irish language sectors.

(AQW 26328/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date figures for entitlement to free school meals relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the table overleaf. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census, which will be carried out during October.

Nursery schools, primary and post primary schools pupils entitled to free schools meals by management type – 2012/13

Management/ school type	Pupils entitled to FSM	Total pupils
Catholic Maintained	39,391	119,078
Controlled	29,417	126,356
Integrated	5,630	21,503
Irish medium	1,574	3,261
Total	76,012	270,198

Source: School census

Notes:

- Figures include all pupils entitled to free school meals, including the nursery sector (whether free school meal or JSA). Special schools and voluntary and private preschool centres have not been included.
- Figures relating to primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Figures for integrated include controlled integrated and grant maintained integrated schools.
- Figures for Irish medium include two controlled Irish medium schools and one Catholic maintained Irish Medium School.
- Irish medium units have been included with the management type of the school to which they are attached, not the Irish medium sector.
- Figures do not include other maintained non Irish medium schools or voluntary schools.

Western Education and Library Board

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25583/11-15, to detail (i) the schools that are still in the ownership of the Western Education and Library Board; and (ii) the schools that have been sold.

(AQW 26329/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Pursuant to my answer to AQW 25583/11-15

(i) A list of the controlled schools still in the ownership of the Western Education and Library Board is as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| ■ Lisnaskea High School | ■ Strabane Grammar School |
| ■ Bridgehill Primary School | ■ Strabane High School |
| ■ Ardstraw Primary school | ■ Devenish College |
| ■ Drumlegagh Primary School | |

(ii) None of these schools have been sold yet.

Primary Schools: Common Funding Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education why fourteen out of the seventeen primary schools in the North Down area will lose financial support from his Department, as a result of the Common Funding Scheme.

(AQW 26346/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The independent review of the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) recommended that more funding should be targeted at pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and that this funding should be weighted towards schools with significant concentrations of disadvantage.

As part of the current consultation on the proposed changes to the CFS, schools have been provided with illustrative budgets which reflect the total Aggregated School Budget (ASB) individual schools would have received in this current financial year, if the proposed changes had been implemented.

My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals. It is not possible therefore to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools next year, until these decisions are made.

In the case of primary schools in the North Down area, based on the illustrative budgets, fourteen out of the seventeen would have lost funding as a result of the proposed changes in funding for TSN allocations and changes to the sports and premises factors. It should be remembered however that these illustrative budgets only and do not reflect the £15.8m that the ASB will increase by in April 2014 nor my final decisions on the proposals currently out for consultation.

Actual allocations for the 2014-15 financial year will be notified to schools in the early part of 2014. They will reflect increases in the ASB in 2014-15, factors at individual school level such as pupil enrolment numbers and FSME as well as my final decisions on changes to the Scheme.

The consultation on the proposals for the reform of the Common Funding Scheme runs until 18 October. I would encourage everyone with an interest in Education to respond to this consultation exercise. I will take into account all responses received before I make my final decisions on the way ahead.

Schools: Crossing Patrols Retention

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether the criteria for the retention of school crossing patrols is the same throughout Northern Ireland.

(AQW 26368/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for the provision of school crossing patrols rests with the Education and Library Boards, and all five Boards have confirmed that they use the same criteria when assessing whether there is a continued need for a school crossing patrol at a particular location.

Paediatric Psychology Reports

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education what weight is given to paediatric psychology reports when assessing the needs of pupils.

(AQW 26371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is normal practice for educational psychologists (EPs) to give due consideration to reports from other psychologists during assessments at Stage 3 (non-statutory) and Stage 4 (statutory) of the Code of Practice on the Assessment and Identification of Special Educational Needs (COP).

At Stage 4 of the COP education and library boards (ELBs) are required to seek parental, educational, medical, psychological and social services advice and the EP must record any advice received from any other psychologist such as a clinical or occupational psychologist who may have relevant knowledge of or information about the child.

Educational Psychologists

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education how many educational psychologists are employed by (i) the North Eastern Education and Library Board; and (ii) his Department.

(AQW 26372/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) currently employ 25.92 full time equivalent (FTE) educational psychologists.
- (ii) The Department of Education does not employ educational psychologists.

Educational Psychologists

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education how schools are allocated pupil assessments by educational psychologists.

(AQW 26373/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At Stage 3 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, when schools are supported by specialists from outside the school including an educational psychologist (EP), education and library boards' educational psychology services employ a time allocation model of delivery. Working closely with their named EP, schools prioritise their needs based on the principles of consultation, equity of access and flexibility. Psychology support using this model is apportioned based on school enrolment, social deprivation and educational achievement.

Schools: Homophobia

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's work to address the problem of homophobia in schools.

(AQW 26382/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the Department's revised curriculum, teachers should address homophobia as part of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary level and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post-primary level. The issue should also be raised as part of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Each school sets its own policy on RSE but this must take account of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006, which gives all pupils the right to learn in a safe environment, treated with respect and dignity and without discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Homophobia will commonly manifest itself through bullying behaviour. Bullying, for whatever reason and in whatever form, is unacceptable and schools are required by law to have policies in place to tackle all types of bullying. I am aware, however, that homophobic bullying remains a live issue.

Addressing this is a shared challenge, which is why my Department funds and is a member of the Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF). The Forum has produced resources specifically dealing with homophobic bullying and has a task group devoted to tackling this and promoting best practice in schools.

The Forum has also produced a new general resource for schools called "Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour" which identifies best practice in creating a whole school anti-bullying culture, assists schools in developing clear and effective discipline and anti-bullying policies. It also provides guidance to help staff support pupils who have been bullied and challenge those pupils engaging in bullying behaviour.

DE makes use of information on sexual orientation gathered through research exercises, to inform its policies and programmes. The last DE initiated research was conducted in 2004 and I have asked my officials to scope fresh research on the needs of young people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGB&T). I have also asked the NIABF to review current bullying provisions and identify those areas requiring further departmental action.

Primary Schools: Budget Reduction

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many children will be affected by the reduction of primary school budgets under the funding formula proposals; and how much money per child will be lost to those schools.

(AQW 26430/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals.

It is not possible therefore to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year, until these decisions are made. In addition, other factors, such as the increased Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) for next year, overall enrolment levels, the number of Free School Meal Entitled pupils, and the number of Newcomer and Traveller pupils etc will impact on funding levels at individual school level.

It is not possible therefore to project the levels of funding that will be available at individual school or pupil level in the incoming financial year.

It should be remembered that investment in schools is on the way up rather than on the way down. The ASB is set to increase by £15.8m next year and I have already announced my intention to inject an additional £30m into it over the next two years, targeted at social deprivation.

Actual allocations for the 2014-15 financial year will be notified to schools in the early part of 2014. They will reflect increases in the ASB in 2014-15, factors at individual school level as well as my final decisions on changes to the Common Funding Scheme.

Primary Schools: Teacher Redundancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether there will be teacher redundancies in North Down as a result of the funding formula proposals for primary schools.

(AQW 26431/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals.

It is not possible therefore to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year, until these decisions are made. In addition, other factors, such as the increased Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) for next year, overall

enrolment levels, the number of Free School Meal Entitled pupils, and the number of Newcomer and Traveller pupils etc will impact on funding levels at individual school level.

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Actual allocations for the 2014-15 financial year will be notified to schools in the early part of 2014. They will reflect increases in the ASB in 2014-15, factors at individual school level as well as my final decisions on changes to the Common Funding Scheme.

Primary Schools: Classroom Closure

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether there will be classroom closures in North Down as a result of the funding formula proposals for primary schools.

(AQW 26432/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals.

It is not possible therefore to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year, until these decisions are made. In addition, other factors, such as the increased Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) for next year, overall enrolment levels, the number of Free School Meal Entitled pupils, and the number of Newcomer and Traveller pupils etc will impact on funding levels at individual school level.

It is not possible therefore to project the levels of funding that will be available at individual school or pupil level in the incoming financial year.

It should be remembered that investment in schools is on the way up rather than on the way down. The ASB is set to increase by £15.8m next year and I have already announced my intention to inject an additional £30m into it over the next two years, targeted at social deprivation.

Actual allocations for the 2014-15 financial year will be notified to schools in the early part of 2014. They will reflect increases in the ASB in 2014-15, factors at individual school level as well as my final decisions on changes to the Common Funding Scheme.

Councils: Closure of Facilities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether he has any evidence of a growing trend in councils of closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis; and if any funded activities are under pressure from closure or additional funding requirements.

(AQW 26445/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: These matters are not the responsibility of my Department.

Christian Brothers Grammar School, Omagh

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made by Omagh Christian Brothers Grammar School in addressing the issues raised in the June 2013 inspection report, particularly the issue of bullying and intimidation of staff.

(AQW 26452/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Progress continues to be made by the school in addressing the issues raised in the recent inspection report but there are further steps to be taken. Senior officials from my Department met recently with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Governors who provided assurance about the determination of the governors to resolve outstanding issues.

The school is required to submit an action plan to the Department by mid-October and is receiving support from the Western Education & Library Board in finalising this plan.

In addition, my Department is working with the school and the WELB to put in place in the coming weeks a suitable mediation arrangement designed to help the governors address outstanding issues and build a culture of trust and mutual support throughout the school community

Special Educational Needs: Change in Number of Children

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education to detail the change in the numbers of children identified as having Special Educational Needs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26471/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date figures relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the table overleaf. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census, which will be carried out during October.

All schools – Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) – 2008/09 – 2012/13

	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13
Total SEN pupils	60,520	63,107	64,931	67,344	69,603
Change in total from previous year	-	2,587	1,824	2,413	2,259

Notes:

- 1 Figures include voluntary and private preschool centres, nursery schools, primary, post-primary and special schools.
- 2 Figures for primary include nursery classes, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- 3 Figures include pupils at stages 1 – 5 of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Newtownbreda High School and Knockbreda High School: Amalgamation

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed amalgamation of Newtownbreda High School and Knockbreda High School.

(AQW 26476/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development Proposal No 237 for the amalgamation of Knockbreda High School and Newtownbreda High School was published by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) on 16 April 2013.

The statutory 2 month consultation period ended on 16 June. However on 25 June the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) advised my Department that it had not carried out the required consultation with schools in its area which may be affected by the 3 SEELB development proposals namely

- Knockbreda/ Newtownbreda High Schools;
- Dundonald High School; and
- Priory Integrated College, Holywood.

This consultation was initiated by BELB in the week commencing 9th September and ended on 30 September. A response from the BELB is expected within the next few weeks.

I will then make my decision on the proposal as soon as possible in order to provide clarity and certainty for the schools affected by the proposals.

Exploris

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to assist in securing the future of Exploris.
(AQW 26518/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the decision by Ards Borough Council to delay the closure of the Exploris Aquarium for two months to allow Government Departments to consider proposals for the future funding of the centre.

The Department of Education (DE) does not provide funding for the upkeep of Exploris, nor would it be appropriate to do so. DE delegates as much funding and decision-making as possible to schools, which are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils. It is a matter for schools to decide on the resources they wish to use to support their delivery of the curriculum, including educational visits to centres such as Exploris.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what assurances he can give that examination subjects offered by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment are timetabled to maximally facilitate multiple entry in other examination boards by being offered on different days.

(AQW 26537/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCEA operates along with the other four main awarding organisations, within the common timetable for GCSE and GCE qualifications agreed by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). By operating this collaborative system, awarding organisations can ensure that timetabling clashes of high entry subjects are avoided, thus minimising excessive hours of examining time for students on any one day.

The JCQ instructions make provision for situations where a clash occurs, i.e. where a student wishes to sit examinations, offered by different awarding organisations, that are timetabled at the same time.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the equating procedure used to support his claim of equivalence between Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment examinations and those of the English board examinations.

(AQW 26538/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To date both proactive and reactive measures have been used to ensure comparability of standards. The regulator of general qualifications here, the Council for the Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards (CCEA), works with counterparts in England and Wales to develop common criteria against which the GCSE and A level specifications (together with sample assessment materials and mark schemes) are accredited.

Joint arrangements are in place for awarding, where the marks achieved on the papers are translated into grades-A* to E for A levels and A* to G for GCSEs.

Joint work is undertaken by the regulators to monitor the operation of the qualification by Awarding Organisations (scrutiny reports) and make judgements about the maintenance of standards over time and across Awarding Organisations (standards reviews).

The regulator here is engaging in discussions with Ofqual and the Welsh Government to ensure that arrangements continue to be in place to assure comparability.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether local pupils will be restricted to taking only Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment examinations funded by the Executive.

(AQW 26539/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no objections to English or Welsh Awarding Organisations offering qualifications here, provided that the content of those qualifications do not corrupt our curriculum.

As policies here and across the other jurisdictions develop, I will wish to keep this matter under review.

Magherafelt: School Start Time

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the starting time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Magherafelt District Council area.

(AQW 26564/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Magherafelt: School Break Time

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the break time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Magherafelt District Council area.

(AQW 26565/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Magherafelt: School Lunchtime

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the lunch time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Magherafelt District Council area.

(AQW 26566/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Magherafelt: School Finish Time

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the finish time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Magherafelt District Council area.

(AQW 26567/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Schools: Rent of Land and Property

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to list the schools which currently rent (i) land; or (ii) properties; and to list the (a) landlord and (b) rent paid.

(AQW 26587/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools which currently rent land or properties are listed in the table below, including details of the rent paid. Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have provided the information on schools in each ELB area and have advised that information about individual landlords is commercially sensitive, held in confidence, protected under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Western Education & Library Board Area

	Landlord	Rent
Dunmullan Primary School (Land)	Private	£500 pa
Lisnagelvin Primary School (Land)	Derry City Council	£1 – if demanded
McClintock Primary School (Land and Building)	Private	£17,500 pa
Dunmullan Primary School (5 car parking spaces)	Church	£17 per week
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Strabane District Council	£6,000 pa
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	Private	£15,000 pa
Bunscoil an Traonaigh, Lisnaskea (Accommodation)	Private	£9,948 pa
Bunscoil an Traonaigh, Lisnaskea (Site)	Private	£19,000 pa
Gaelscoil na Daróige, Derry (Site)	Private	£11,300 pa
Gaelscoil na Daróige, Derry (Accommodation)	Private	£6,200 pa
Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh, Limavady (site)	Private (1)	£6,700 pa
Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh, Limavady (accommodation)	Private (2)	£41,600 pa
Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh, Limavady (accommodation)	Private (3)	£15,600 pa
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh (Site)	Private (1)	£4335.84 pa
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh (Site)	Private (2)	Lease awaited
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh (Accommodation)	Private (3)	£12,500 pa

Belfast Education & Library Board Area

	Landlord	Rent
Gaelscoil an Lonnain	Private	£35,000 pa
Gaelscoil na Mona (site)	Private	£14,450 pa
Gaelscoil na Mona (accommodation)	Private	£23,689 pa
Scoil an Droichid	Private	£8,000 pa
Little Flower HS	Private	£32,000 pa
Blackmountain PS (Caretaker's House)	NIHE	£3,297 pa

*South Eastern Education & Library Board Area

	Landlord	Rent
Brookfield Special	Private	£1,070 pa
Derryboy PS	Private	£100 pa
Ballyvester Primary School	Church	£8,250 pa
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan (Site)	Private	£9,000 pa

Southern Education & Library Board Area

	Landlord	Rent
Armstrong Primary School, Armagh	Private	£1,600 pa
Carrick Primary School, Lurgan	Craigavon Borough Council	£4.83 pa
Armagh High School - Playing Fields	Private	£1,400 pa

Craigavon Senior High School, Lurgan Campus	Private	£12,750 pa
Craigavon Senior High School, Lurgan Campus	Private	£13,750 pa
Craigavon Senior High School, Lurgan Campus	Private	£7,500 pa
Dromore Central Primary School	Private	£8.00 pa
Maralin Village PS	Church	£1,000 pa
Millington PS	Private	£10.00 pa
The Cope PS	Church	£1,500 pa
Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel (Site)	Private (1)	£2,016 pa
Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel (Accommodation)	Private (2)	£7,764 pa
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua, Dungannon (Site)	Private (1)	No rent demanded
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua, Dungannon (Accommodation)	Private (2)	£15,600 pa
Gaelscoil Eoghain, Cookstown (Site)	Private (1)	£13,800 pa
Gaelscoil Eoghain, Cookstown (Accommodation)	Private (2)	£15,600 pa
Bunscoil an Iúir, Newry (Site + Accommodation)	Newry & Mourne District Council	£40,000 pa
Gaelscoil Uí Néill (Site)	Private	£8,000 pa
Gaelscoil Uí Néill (Site Access)	NIHE	If demanded

North Eastern Education & Library Board Area

	Landlord	Rent
Carnalbanagh PS (Land)	Church	£1.200 pa
Carnalbanagh PS (use of Church Hall)	Church	£10,750 pa
Carnalridge Primary School	Private	£25 pa
Creavery Primary School (Building)	Private	£8,500 pa
Creavery Primary School (Land)	Private	£1,000 pa
Crumlin Primary School	Private	£30,000 pa
Culnady Primary School (use of Church Hall)	Church	£1,000 pa
Culnady Primary School (car park)	Church	£850 pa
Desertmartin Primary School (use of Church Hall)	Church	£750 pa
Longstone Primary School	Private	£13,500 pa
Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí (Car Park)	Private	£6,500 pa
Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí (Mobile Site)	Private	£525 pa
Parkgate Primary School (use of Church Hall)	Church	£12.00 per hour
Straid Primary School (Land for playground)	Private	£2,000 pa
Straid Primary School (Mobile site)	Church	£2,000 pa
Straid Primary School (use of Church Hall)	Church	£5,100 pa
Gaelscoil na Spéiríni, Draperstown	Private (1)	£8,000 pa
Gaelscoil na Spéiríni, Draperstown	Private (2)	£5,000 pa
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach, Crumlin (Accommodation)	Private	£4,400 pa
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach, Crumlin (main hall)	Antrim Borough Council	£5.10 per hour
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach, Crumlin (sports hall)	Antrim Borough Council	£4.10 per hour
Gaelscoil Éanna, Glengormley (Site)	Private	£7,000 pa
Gaelscoil Éanna, Glengormley (Accommodation)	Private	£15,600 pa

Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí, Magherafelt	NEELB	1p if demanded
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Integrated Schools

	Landlord	Rent
Drumlins Integrated Primary School - Site	Private	£32,000 pa
Drumlins Integrated Primary School - Mobile	Private	£26,700 pa
Blackwater Integrated College	SEELB	£136 pa
Blackwater Integrated College - Mobiles	Private	£44,600 pa

* South Eastern Education & Library Board has also added that “there are a number of other sites for which a rent is paid but this is by way of ground rent and not for rental of land (eg play area, siting of mobiles). There are additional rentals in relation to other Board areas eg youth, grounds maintenance but the question appears to relate solely to schools.”

Schools: Standard Inspections

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to list the schools that have not had a full standard inspection in the last ten years; and the reasons why they have not been inspected.

(AQW 26590/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The standard inspection is an inspection model for post-primary schools which was introduced by ETI in 2006. In the last ten years (1 September 2003 to 31 August 2013) three post-primary schools have not had a published inspection report using this approach or its predecessors. These three schools were involved in the School Support Programme which resulted in annual published follow-up inspection report for each of them until 2007.

The names of the 3 post-primary schools cannot be released as they are due for inspection. This is in accordance with the standard two week inspection notification period.

Schools: Suicide Awareness

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department has taken to help schools deal with the issue of suicide; and what is the minimum level of advice and support pupils can expect from a school in relation to suicide awareness.

(AQW 26596/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: If a school has experienced the death of a pupil by suicide, support is available from the Critical Incident Response Team at the local Education and Library Board. The Team will support the Senior Management Team and direct the school to a range of appropriate services. Counselling support is made available in these circumstances to pupils in all grant-aided primary and post-primary schools.

A “Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools” along with a supporting DVD is in the final stages of preparation and will be launched in this school year. It aims to help schools prepare for a range of serious incidents such as the sudden death of a pupil.

While there is no minimum level of advice and support for pupils, each school will determine an appropriate response as part of their pastoral care arrangements

As part of the suicide prevention arrangements, the Department aims to help schools promote positive emotional health and wellbeing of pupils.

The Revised Curriculum has elements designed to help pupils identify the stressors in their lives and develop the capacity to deal with them.

The ‘iMatter’ Programme provides advice and guidance on emotional health and wellbeing. Working groups have developed a range of products including a suite of 20 homework diary inserts / posters on topics of concern to young people including self-esteem, substance abuse and relationships. These detail sources of help and support for the pupils.

Free School Meals: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education how many pupils have Free School Meal Entitlement in each school in South Down; and what this figure represents as a percentage of the number of pupils attending each school.

(AQW 26598/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date figures for entitlement to free school meals relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the tables below. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census which will be carried out during October.

Pupils entitled to free school meals who are enrolled in schools located in the South Down constituency - 2012/13

Voluntary and private preschool centres

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Ardglass Community Playgroup	24	7	29%
Atticall PreSchool Playgroup	15	0	0%
Ballykinlar Cross Community Preschool	14	*	*
Busy Bees Playgroup (Burren)	24	*	*
Carrick PreSchool	24	*	*
Castlewella Community Playgroup	26	0	0%
Clonduff Playgroup	52	10	19%
Crossgar Community Playgroup	21	*	*
Drumaness CrossCommunity Playgroup	30	*	*
Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup	21	*	*
Dunnaman Childrens Centre	13	5	38%
Glenn & Barr Playgroup	24	*	*
Great Oaks Playgroup	10	0	0%
Jolly Tots Playgroup	45	*	*
Kids Kabin PreSchool (was Drumaroad CC PG)	19	0	0%
Kilcoo Playgroup	23	*	*
Kilkeel Playgroup	16	*	*
Killough Playgroup	9	*	*
Kingdom Playgroup	21	5	24%
Leitrim Community Playgroup	24	*	*
Little Folk Playgroup	38	*	*
Loughinisland Playgroup	26	*	*
Lower Mourne PreSchool Playgroup	18	*	*
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	19	0	0%
Naiscoil na mBeann	19	*	*
Naiscoil Uachtar Tíre	22	*	*
Newcastle PreSchool Playgroup	21	*	*
Playlinks Playgroup	14	*	*
Rascals 'n' Ruffians	26	5	19%
Rathfriland Pre School Playgroup	51	*	*
Rathkeltair Cross Community Playgroup	21	*	*
Rockmount Day Nursery	17	0	0%
Saul Cross Community Playgroup	25	0	0%
Strawberry Tree Playgroup	26	*	*
Teconnaught CrossCommunity Playgroup	20	0	0%
Tiny Toons Community Playgroup	12	*	*

Nursery schools

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Convent of Mercy Nursery School	52	31	60%
Downpatrick Nursery School	26	13	50%
Kilkeel Nursery School	83	16	19%
Seaview Nursery School	78	12	15%
St Colmcille's Nursery School	52	26	50%

Primary schools

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	220	56	25%
Annalong Primary School	167	51	31%
Annsborough Primary School	41	11	27%
Ballydown Primary School	333	28	8%
Ballyholland Primary School	232	43	19%
Brackenagh West Primary School	169	32	19%
Bronte Primary School	161	16	10%
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	84	37	44%
Carrick Primary School	401	37	9%
Castlewellan Primary School	73	22	30%
Cedar Integrated Primary School	207	27	13%
Christ the King Primary School	95	34	36%
Clontifleece Primary School	34	5	15%
Cumran Primary School	200	35	18%
Down High School	57	*	*
Downpatrick Primary School	204	72	35%
Dromore Road Primary School	72	28	39%
Drumadonnell Primary School	204	25	12%
Gaelscoil Na mBeann	20	10	50%
Glasswater Primary School	84	14	17%
Grange Primary School	97	32	33%
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	130	21	16%
Iveagh Primary School	233	72	31%
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	99	40	40%
Kilkeel Primary School	410	109	27%
Killowen Primary School, Rostrevor	106	13	12%
Moneydarragh Primary School	72	12	17%
Newcastle Primary School	167	52	31%
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	412	159	39%
Sacred Heart Primary School, Newcastle	77	25	32%

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Spa Primary School	156	10	6%
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	239	73	31%
St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor	157	50	32%
St Colman's Primary School, Kilkeel	186	94	51%
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	177	42	24%
St Colman's Primary School, Banbridge	160	27	17%
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	163	117	72%
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	446	147	33%
St Francis' Primary School, Castlederg	82	23	28%
St Joseph's Primary School, Downpatrick	61	25	41%
St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle	164	30	18%
St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford	43	12	28%
St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella	72	12	17%
St Joseph's Primary School, Killough	72	32	44%
St Joseph's Primary School, Kilkeel	84	23	27%
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	185	24	13%
St Malachy's Primary School, Coleraine	67	17	25%
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	133	43	32%
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan	326	118	36%
St Mary's Aughlisnafin	160	48	30%
St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass	86	15	17%
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	339	109	32%
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	103	32	31%
St Mary's Primary School, Annalong	62	22	35%
St Marys Primary School Dechomet	79	16	20%
St Matthew's Primary School, Magheramayo	60	18	30%
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass	101	54	53%
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	184	29	16%
St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan	52	9	17%
St Patrick's Primary School, Downpatrick	166	61	37%
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	303	79	26%
St Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown	288	99	34%
St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh	86	18	21%
St Paul's Primary School, Cabra	73	14	19%
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	398	53	13%
The Holy Family Primary School	192	29	15%

Post-primary schools

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Abbey Christian Brothers Grammar School	907	87	10%
Blackwater Integrated College	271	71	26%
De La Salle High School	354	118	33%
Down High School	968	35	4%
Kilkeel High School	680	78	11%
Rathfriland High School	311	52	17%
Sacred Heart Grammar School	849	78	9%
Shimna Integrated College	547	98	18%
St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	372	80	22%
St Columban's College, Kilkeel	193	64	33%
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	587	85	14%
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	1015	283	28%
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	889	254	29%
St Mary's High School, Downpatrick	437	136	31%
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	718	50	7%

Source: School census

Notes:

- 7 Figures include all pupils entitled to free school meals, including the nursery/preschool sector (whether free school meal or JSA). Special schools have not been included.
- 8 Figures relating to primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- 9 * denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Lisanelly

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25903/11-15, how he proposes to deal with the issues of ownership surrounding the Lisanelly project.

(AQW 26600/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Lisanelly site is in the ownership of the Department of Education. As the Department moves forward with the implementation of the Lisanelly campus it will be engaging with the relevant stakeholders to establish an agreed vehicle for dealing with the ownership, management and financing of the site, which will form the basis of a legally binding Memorandum of Agreement (MoA).

Area Learning Community

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25329/11-15, to outline the criteria used to allocate the funding.

(AQW 26601/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The criteria against which applicants to the Strategic Development Fund were assessed were the extent to which the proposal:

- Included activities that will enable the ALC to become more focused on Programme for Government commitments to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of underachieving pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Assessed existing levels of performance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, established a baseline for year 1, and set realistic targets for improvement
- Used data within schools to identify and prioritise pupils
- Proposed actions leading to:
 - the identification and sharing of best practice
 - the drawing up of strategies for improvement of outcomes
 - the building of sustainable improvement through, for example, the development of teaching plans and resources

- Clearly outlined what the role of school leaders, year heads/heads of departments, class teachers, non-teaching staff/ volunteers, and any other expertise would be in relation to raising literacy and numeracy standards for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Included plans for capacity building across the ALC

Further priority was also given to applications that demonstrated:

- How parents would be involved in their child's literacy and numeracy skills development
- How Assessment for Learning processes would be incorporated

Strategic Funding Panels

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25286/11-15, what advice his officials gave the Strategic Funding panels prior to the assessment process of applications for 2013/14.
(AQW 26602/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Fund is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) on DE's behalf. In order to ensure compliance with the aims and criteria for the Fund, DE continues to require, as in previous years, that funding is appropriately allocated and managed by EYO in accordance with Managing Public Money (MPMNI). DE officials do not directly advise the Strategic Funding Panels.

I am advised by EYO that the Strategic Funding Panels were notified that in assessing applications to the Fund, projects must evidence financial need, as well as other issues such as quality and governance.

Schools: Building Handbook

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the Building Schools Handbook was last reviewed.
(AQW 26603/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Schools' Building Handbook is divided into a number of sections relating to school builds for nursery, primary, secondary schools, school meals accommodation and energy efficiency. The nursery section of the handbook carries a date of February 2009, the primary June 2011 and the secondary March 2003. While the section relating to secondary schools is dated 2003 a number of draft updates relating to accommodation for media studies, learning support, Disability Discrimination Act requirements and Information and Communications Technology infrastructure have been issued, on a project by project basis, to schools and their design teams.

The Department is currently reviewing the secondary school section of the handbook and the sections relating to school meals accommodation and energy efficiency. When these have been finalised updates will be published on the Departments website.

GCSEs and A Levels: Changes

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the meetings which have taken place between his officials and officials from the Department of Education in England and the Department for Education and Skills in Wales about the potential changes to GCSEs and A-Levels.
(AQW 26604/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials attend quarterly three-jurisdiction meetings with their counterparts from the Department for Education in England, and the Department for Education and Skills in Wales. The meetings are also attended by the qualifications regulators and officials from the Department for Employment and Learning.

The meetings provide a formal opportunity for officials to share information and provide policy updates from their respective jurisdictions. Potential changes to GCSEs and A levels have been and continue to be included on the agenda for these meetings.

My officials also met their Welsh counterparts earlier this year to provide updates and exchange views on qualifications reviews that were ongoing in both jurisdictions.

Good channels of communication exist between officials in the three jurisdictions.

Schools: Transport

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education why his Department has instructed Education and Library Boards not to offer pupils assistance with transport to a more distant school when A-Levels are available within statutory walking distance of a pupil's home, even if all subjects are not available at the nearest school; and for his assessment of the impact this decision has on freedom of subject choice.
(AQW 26633/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the existing Home to School Transport policy, assistance with school transport is based on only two criteria, that is (i) distance, and (ii) suitable school. At post-primary level, transport assistance is restricted to pupils who enrol at a school which is more than three miles from their home, and who have been unsuccessful in gaining a place at all schools of the same category within that three mile limit. While A-Level pupils may decide to apply to a school which is more than three miles from their home in order to study a particular combination of subjects, they will not be eligible for transport

assistance unless they have applied to, and been turned down by, all schools of the same category within the three mile limit. Transport cost is therefore a factor which must be taken into consideration when deciding which school to attend at A-Level.

While there may be some instances in which pupils feel that the current Home to School Transport policy restricts their choice of subjects at A-Level, since the introduction of the Entitlement Framework in September 2013, all schools have been required to offer a minimum of 21 courses to pupils in Years 13 and 14. This minimum requirement will increase to 24 courses from next September, and to 27 courses from September 2015. The Entitlement Framework will help to ensure that every pupil has access to a wide range of courses from across all the areas of learning, no matter which post-primary school they attend.

In recognition that the existing Home to School Transport policy may not have kept pace with the significant changes which have benefited other areas of the education system over recent years, I have signalled my intention to bring forward a wide-ranging review of this policy. My officials are currently taking forward work to establish the review and I hope to make an announcement in the near future.

Cookstown: School Finish Time

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the finish time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Cookstown District Council area.

(AQW 26635/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Cookstown: School Start Time

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the start time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Cookstown District Council area.

(AQW 26636/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Cookstown: School Break Time

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the break time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Cookstown District Council area.

(AQW 26637/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Cookstown: School Lunchtime

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the lunch time of each (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school in the Cookstown District Council area.

(AQW 26638/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In line with this policy, schools have the flexibility to set their own starting, break, lunch and finishing times. The Department of Education does not therefore hold such information at individual school level.

Coalisland: Nursery Places

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to deal with the shortfall of nursery places in Coalisland.

(AQW 26662/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At the end of the Pre-School Admissions Process for 2013/14 all parents in the Coalisland area who participated fully in the process received the offer of a funded place for their child.

Preparations are underway for the admissions process to pre-school settings in September 2014. The Department will continue to liaise with the Southern Education and Library Board to ensure that the level of provision in area remains sufficient to meet the Programme for Government commitment of providing a place for every family that wants it.

Coalisland: Nursery Places

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education how many eligible children in the Coalisland area have yet to receive a nursery or pre-school place for September 2013.

(AQW 26663/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At the end of the Pre-School Admissions Process for 2013/14 all parents in the Coalisland area who participated fully in the process received the offer of a funded place for their child.

Preparations are underway for the admissions process to pre-school settings in September 2014. The Department will continue to liaise with the Southern Education and Library Board to ensure that the level of provision in area remains sufficient to meet the Programme for Government commitment of providing a place for every family that wants it.

Children Who Cannot Attend School

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25553/11-15, when he will publish draft guidance.

(AQW 26702/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work on this guidance is progressing and it is intended that a draft will be shared with the Education Committee, Education and Library Boards and other interested stakeholders early in the New Year.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what evidence there is to show that there are higher instances of special education needs in areas where there is a higher uptake of free school meals.

(AQW 26712/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Schools: Common Funding Scheme

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what impact the review of the Common Funding Scheme will have on the budgets of (i) nursery units and schools; (ii) primary schools; (iii) secondary and grammar schools; and (iv) special schools in East Antrim.

(AQW 26738/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Indicative budgets for each grant-aided school were prepared as part of the consultation process. Those budgets are for illustrative purposes only and reflect the delegated budget that individual schools would have received in the current financial year, if the proposed changes had been implemented. The figures are based on this year's enrolment numbers, free school meals entitlement and Aggregated Schools' Budget (plus the additional £10m for social deprivation).

I would also emphasise that the budgets schools are working with do not include the additional £15.8 million that will go into the aggregated schools budget next year.

It is not possible, therefore, to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year until I make my final decisions on the proposals which are currently out for consultation.

I have not made final decisions on changes to the Scheme. I have made it clear that I am open to hearing alternative ideas.

The consultation on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme closes on 18 October and I would encourage everyone with an interest in education to take part in this debate and to submit their views to my Department by that date.

Free School Meals: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils with Free School Meals entitlement in each school in South Antrim; and what this figure represents as a percentage of the number of pupils attending each school.

(AQW 26741/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date figures for entitlement to free school meals relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the tables below. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census which will be carried out during October.

Pupils entitled to free school meals who are enrolled in schools located in the South Antrim constituency - 2012/13
Voluntary and private preschool centres

School name	Total funded enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
ABC Day Nursery	25	0	0%
Ballymacward PreSchool Playgroup	8	*	*

School name	Total funded enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Crumlin Integrated Pre School	12	*	*
Greendale Day Nursery	16	*	*
Kilbride Playgroup	12	*	*
Little Hands PreSchool (previously Greystone)	14	*	*
Maine Integrated Playgroup	19	*	*
Mallusk Community Playgroup	13	0	0%
Muckamore PreSchool Playgroup	26	7	27%
Naiscoil Éanna	33	9	27%
Naiscoil Ghleann Darach	14	*	*
Randalstown Community Playgroup	18	0	0%
Round Tower Community Playgroup	37	9	24%
St Comgall's Playgroup	24	*	*
St MacNissis Preschool Playgroup	24	0	0%
Thrushfield Nursery	20	0	0%
Tiny Tots PreSchool Centre	23	0	0%
TirnanÓg Playgroup	26	*	*

Nursery schools

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Ballyclare Nursery School	156	8	5%
Mossley Nursery School	78	16	21%
St Joseph's Nursery School	78	13	17%
Steeple Nursery School	156	20	13%

Primary schools

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Antrim Primary School	596	94	16%
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School	144	14	10%
Ballyclare Primary School	472	98	21%
Ballycraig Primary School	138	70	51%
Ballymacrickett Primary School	333	45	14%
Ballymacward Primary School	60	13	22%
Ballynure Primary School	117	6	5%
Carnmoney Primary School	371	84	23%
Creavery Primary School	62	13	21%
Creggan Primary School	116	16	14%
Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School	156	14	9%
Doagh Primary School	64	6	9%

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Duneane Primary School	50	0	0%
Earlview Primary School	166	94	57%
Fairview Primary School	527	55	10%
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	75	11	15%
Greystone Primary School	181	63	35%
Groggan Primary School	93	14	15%
Kilbride Primary School	126	15	12%
Loanends Primary School	186	7	4%
Maine Integrated Primary School	113	19	17%
Mallusk Primary School	65	14	22%
McKinney Primary School Dundrod	147	15	10%
Moneynick Primary School	66	15	23%
Mossley Primary School	618	104	17%
Mount St Michael's Primary School	457	77	17%
Parkgate Primary School	84	8	10%
Parkhall Primary School	213	127	60%
Randalstown Central Primary School	203	23	11%
Rathenraw Integrated Primary School	77	53	69%
Round Tower Integrated Primary School	280	74	26%
St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim	476	91	19%
St Joseph's Primary School, Antrim	205	81	40%
St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	766	121	16%
St Macnisiuis' Primary School, Antrim	27	*	*
St Macnissi's Primary School, Newtownabbey	177	12	7%
St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School, Toomebridge	190	44	23%
Straid Primary School	87	8	9%
Straidhavern Primary School	52	*	*
Templepatrick Primary School	444	27	6%
Thompson Primary School	167	14	8%
Tildarg Primary School	77	8	10%
Tir-na-Nog Primary School	23	*	*

Post-primary schools

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Antrim Grammar School	749	25	3%
Ballyclare High School	1223	22	2%
Ballyclare Secondary School	1037	125	12%
Crumlin Integrated College	169	32	19%
Parkhall Integrated College	702	170	24%

School name	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
St Benedict's College, Randalstown	412	122	30%

Source: School census

Notes:

10. Figures include all pupils entitled to free school meals, including the nursery/preschool sector (whether free school meal or JSA). Special schools have not been included.
11. Figures relating to primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
12. * denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Common Funding Formula: Consultation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what is the closing date for responses to the consultation on the proposed changes to the Common Funding Formula.

(AQW 26762/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Consultation on the proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme was launched on 26 June and continues until 18 October 2013.

I am currently considering requests I have received for an extension to this deadline and will make a decision on this shortly.

Dyscalculia

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many children in each Education and Library Board have been identified as having dyscalculia.

(AQW 26773/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date figures for special educational needs relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the table overleaf. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census which will be carried out during October.

Number of pupils with dyscalculia – 2012/13

ELB	Total pupils recorded as having dyscalculia
Belfast	13
Western	47
North Eastern	36
South Eastern	24
Southern	34
Total	154

Source: School census

Note:

13. Figures include pupils in voluntary and private preschool centres, nursery schools, primary, post-primary and special schools.
14. Figures include pupils at stage 1 – 5 of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Glenwood Primary School

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education when work will commence on the new hub school at Glenwood Primary and Edenderry Nursery schools.

(AQO 4728/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Glenwood Primary School and Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast was one of the 22 projects included in my announcement in January 2013 to be advanced in planning.

The Board is currently preparing Economic Appraisals (EA) for both projects.

The Edenderry Nursery School EA will be completed and submitted to the Department of Education for review and approval in October 2013. Full Planning Approval has been granted for a new Nursery building on a new site on Lanark Way.

Preparation of the Glenwood EA is on-going. It is anticipated that a target date for completion and submission of the Glenwood EA will be agreed early November 2013. There are a number of issues that impact on the timescale of the Glenwood EA such as Area Planning, the listed status of the Glenwood building and the identification of suitable sites within the pupil catchment area. The Board is actively working on these separate strands of the scheme.

Small Schools Policy

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Education how he intends to develop a Small Schools Policy, as recommended in the Review of the Common Funding Scheme.

(AQO 4725/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Having carefully considered all the recommendations in the report, I set out my own proposals for change to the Common Funding Scheme in a statement to the Assembly on 11 June. The proposed changes are currently being consulted upon.

In my statement I advised that I have no difficulty with the thinking behind the recommendation but I do not believe that another policy is necessary.

We already have a Sustainable Schools policy that sets out the criteria and quality indicators to help managing authorities to assess schools' sustainability.

We already have an extensive area based planning process underway designed to ensure that schools are planned strategically to deliver sustainable, high quality education.

I will provide further clarification within existing policy on the circumstances as to when a small school will need to be retained and how it will be supported when the current consultation has concluded and responses have been considered.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's approach to addressing the problem of the sexual exploitation of children.

(AQO 4726/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am very disturbed about the nature and extent of the recent child exploitation investigation.

As the single statutory service in daily contact with the majority of children and young people, a school's role in responding to concerns about an individual child and teaching all children to keep safe is vital.

I am committed to protecting our children and young people and to ensuring that our child protection arrangements within education are robust and to implementing an effective preventative curriculum which teaches all children how to keep safe.

My Department supports schools through the 'iMatter' Programme, in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils by providing advice and support on issues such as sex abuse, domestic violence and abuse relationships to post-primary aged pupils.

An independent school based counselling service is accessible to post primary age during difficult and vulnerable periods and the Child Protection Support Service operates a Helpline for schools' staff on child protection matters and provides extensive training, including on child sexual exploitation.

Women's Aid makes a significant contribution to preventative education for young people through their 'Helping Hands' Programme in primary schools, training teachers to understand the context and impact of domestic violence and early intervention strategies for young people who do not feel safe.

I have recently commissioned the NSPCC to work jointly with the Department on an 'effective preventative education programme' producing a learning package of training, development and support for schools to implement delivery of 'keeping safe' messages to all primary school aged children.

Teachers: Professional Development Scheme

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of a Professional Development Scheme.

(AQO 4727/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I consider that good teaching is central to school improvement and I want to ensure that there is a coherent system of continuous professional development throughout a teacher's career.

In doing so my Department needs to review teacher education programmes to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of pupils in the 21st century – particularly to address underachievement in literacy and numeracy.

I intend that a new single school development service will facilitate and commission professional development for all teachers.

Schools are best placed to take forward improvement and identify their support and professional development needs. The new service will therefore be designed to be responsive to the needs of school principals.

The new regional approach will deliver greater consistency, avoid duplication of provision and thus ensure value for money. This will ensure teachers and school leaders receive the support they need.

I am not happy with the time it has taken to develop this service. It is essential that irrespective of the timing of the establishment of ESA, work is now taken forward to establish the service, as quickly as possible.

A project Manager has been appointed to lead the development and implementation of a new School Development Service.

A series of workshops has been organised to engage with school leaders on the role and structure of the new service.

Common Funding Scheme: Rural Schools

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme on rural schools.

(AQO 4729/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have already outlined to this Assembly, in earlier statements and in particular during a recent debate, my intention to continue 'putting pupils first'. The changes I propose to introduce will target areas of highest need in an effort to try and break the clearly evidenced link between social deprivation and poor educational outcomes. The implementation of the proposed changes may result in some schools experiencing an increase in their budget and others a reduction.

Although there are a higher number of rural schools than urban schools, the number of pupils attending urban schools is nearly twice that of rural schools, 66% compared to 34%. In addition, there are a higher percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals in urban schools than rural schools – 34% Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) in urban schools compared to 22% in rural schools.

As funding for social deprivation is awarded using Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME), as an indicator of social deprivation, it follows therefore that urban schools are more likely to gain funding under the new proposals, as I am directing funding to those schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage.

Free School Meals

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Education to outline why the redirection of funding towards schools, on the basis of the number of free school meals claimants, is good educational practice.

(AQO 4730/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The independent panel which reviewed the Common Funding Scheme examined the use of free school meal entitlement (FSME) as an indicator of social deprivation as being the most appropriate indicator of social disadvantage. It commented, "Free school meal entitlement currently provides a reliable indication of the relative concentration of children at risk of poor education outcomes due to social deprivation".

Evidence shows that socio-economic background is the strongest factor impacting on pupils' attainment here. The link between underachievement and socio-economic background, as measured by FSME is stronger here than in other OECD countries.

Whilst the proportion of FSME school leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs or equivalent, including GCSEs in English and maths has been increasing in recent years, almost twice the proportion of school leavers not FSME achieve at this level - 34.1% compared to 67.9%. I am determined to take action to break this link.

I believe that a good education, which leads to coherent, recognised qualifications, is the most effective means to breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

This is why, in line with the recommendations of the review panel, I will be making additional funding available for social deprivation, targeted specifically at those schools with the highest proportions of FSME pupils. I recognise the particular challenges which children from deprived backgrounds encounter in accessing and participating in education.

The social deprivation element of funding going to schools reinforces my determination and commitment to direct funding to those young people in most need regardless of ability.

However, I want to be sure that this extra money is being used effectively and schools will need to provide detailed plans of what outcomes, the children this money is targeted at, can expect. Robust accountability systems will therefore need to be in place.

This funding is necessary if we are to deliver our Programme for Government commitment to tackle disadvantage and break the gap in educational attainment between the least and most deprived communities.

Woodlands Speech and Language Unit

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale behind the planned closure of the Woodlands Speech and Language Unit.

(AQO 4731/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In taking the decision in relation to the Woodlands Speech and Language unit I have had to consider the best long-term solution for children with speech and language needs in the area.

It is evident that the Woodlands facility has served children well. However the Speech and Language provision that Woodlands Special Unit provides was delivered under the management of a special school and was not in line the policy of Inclusion as set out in legislation in the Education (NI) Order 1996.

The new arrangements will provide increased and more localised provision for the future based on a tried and tested model which fully complies with the legislation.

I firmly believe that the key to success for the proposed changes will be a managed transition to the new arrangements to ensure that quality provision is in place before any change is put in place at Woodlands. That way parents can be confident and assured that their children will receive appropriate education to meet their needs.

For that reason I modified the proposals for the new provision to commence from September 2014 rather than 2013. This will allow sufficient time to ensure all the necessary steps have been taken to get the new units up and running.

Children currently enrolled at the Woodlands Unit will, if necessary and in line with parental wishes, be able to complete the 2 year period in the Unit. However, should any parent wish to avail of a place in the new units before the 2 year period is over, then I have asked the WELB to give these children priority when allocating places in the new units.

The new arrangements will provide increased contact with and support for mainstream teachers in the 3 primary schools - Ebrington, St Anne's and Ballykelly Primary Schools.

This has not been an easy decision however I believe it is in the best interest of children who will need this service in the future.

Children and Young People: Empowering and Protecting

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how his Department, and its Arm's Length Bodies, assist in empowering and protecting children and young people.

(AQO 4732/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to protecting and educating our children and young people in how to keep safe. My Department undertakes and supports a number of initiatives in this regard including strands of the Revised curriculum, the 'iMatter' Programme, the independent school based counselling service and support for the NSPCC learning package of training, development and support for schools and funding to support looked-after children in education.

My Department also funds the Sure Start Programme which supports children from the top 20% of disadvantaged areas. The project offers support to parents of children under the age of 4.

Schools: E-learning

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the benefits of E-Learning in schools.

(AQO 4733/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: E-learning is now an accepted method for teaching and learning in our schools across all Areas of Learning.

The use of technology compliments work by the classroom teacher and I would see a key benefit of such learning in the opportunities it gives pupils to help them become independent learners. It provides all pupils, regardless of what school they attend, their background or geographical location, with opportunities to learn that we could not have imagined 20 years ago. E-learning enhances and individualises the pupil's educational experience, helping them to enjoy learning and improve their performance and thereby raise overall standards.

Online, pupils can, in their own time, make considered contributions which they may not have had the confidence to do in an open discussion in the classroom situation. It also provides flexibility for students with different learning styles and it is widely accepted that the use of technology to learn can have a positive result in terms of engaging learners in difficult to reach groups.

E-learning can take place inside and outside the classroom so its accessibility is a key advantage for pupils. C2k is responsible for providing a fully managed ICT service for all grant-aided schools which includes PCs and laptops, e-mail and secure access to the Internet. The latest contract will bring in many new Digital Technology services for pupils and teachers, available anytime and anywhere via the Education Cloud.

Using technology to learn also helps our pupils develop the ICT skills which are so necessary for our knowledge-based economy, skills that are transferable to other areas of their lives.

Looked-after Children

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are looked-after children.

(AQW 26856/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The October 2012 school census information indicated that there were a total of 1,425 looked-after children in schools.

Learning Conditions: Private Diagnoses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether a privately obtained and funded diagnosis of a child's learning condition is recognised by the Southern Education and Library Board; and if not, why this is the case, given that it would be in the best interests of the child and would save departmental funding.

(AQW 26900/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that it takes account of all information provided to it, including private reports, as part of the referral process to the board's Educational Psychology Service. A private report will not, however, be the sole basis for referral.

Statementing: Occupational Therapist Reports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether an occupational therapist report counts towards, or is it taken into consideration in, a school's decision to statement a child; and if so, when in the process these reports are considered.
(AQW 26918/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is normal practice for education and library boards to give due consideration to reports from allied health professionals, such as occupational therapists, during their assessments at Stage 3 (non-statutory) and Stage 4 (statutory) of the Code of Practice on the Assessment and Identification of Special Educational Needs.

Department for Employment and Learning

Youth Employment Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the success of the Youth Employment Scheme to date.
(AQW 26192/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Youth Employment Scheme, a voluntary programme for young unemployed people was formally launched on 2 July 2012. From that date until 27 September 2013, almost 1900 employers had signed agreements to participate in the scheme, offering over 4200 opportunities. To date, 2090 young people have taken up an opportunity and of these, 661 commenced full time employment.

I am pleased that the Youth Employment Scheme has been successfully implemented, and is now well integrated with the full range of provision offered by my Department to help young people acquire essential work experience and skills.

While the scheme is proving to be particularly successful in generating opportunities, a Post Implementation Review of the YES recommended some revisions to further increase uptake by young people. These enhancements were introduced on 30 September 2013 and the impact of the changes will be reviewed in twelve months. The revisions include the payment of a Benefit Based Training Allowance to participants on work experience, some modifications to restrictions on the eligible job growth sectors and engaging Steps to Work Lead Contractors to source and deliver training within the Skills Development placements.

Higher Education: Environmental Adjustments

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25524/11-15, (i) what is the Department's definition of (a) mental illness; (b) learning disability; (c) special needs; and (d) conditions requiring reasonable environmental adjustment; and (ii) whether these definitions apply across all further and higher education colleges and institutions.
(AQW 26194/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department adheres to the definition laid down by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and The Equality Act 2010, which define a person with disabilities as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. I can advise that further education colleges and higher education institutions also adhere to the same definitions.

In discharging their functions, all bodies bound by this legislation, including further education colleges and higher education institutions, consider the effects of any impairment, rather than the underlying condition itself. This ensures that the needs of all students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified and addressed in an appropriate way.

Employment: Part-time Work for 16- to 24-Year-Olds

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what work his Department is doing to encourage 16-24 year olds to undertake part-time work, in an effort to improve skills and work experience.
(AQW 26241/11-15)

Dr Farry: As Minister for Employment and Learning, I have introduced a comprehensive range of initiatives to address youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. My primary aim is to equip young people with the necessary employability skills to enable them to move into full time sustainable employment.

While young unemployed people are expected to seek full time employment, I appreciate that due to individual circumstances some young people may need to limit the number of hours they can work. These young people will be assisted by Employment Service staff to find suitable employment or avail of the programmes on offer. The Department's job vacancy website clearly identifies vacancies that are classified as part time (there are currently 600 being advertised) to assist jobseekers interested in securing part time employment.

Young people unable to find full time employment in their chosen field are encouraged to apply for suitable part time employment with the view to securing full time employment in the longer term.

Being able to demonstrate employability skills is key to securing employment, and Employment Service Advisers in JobCentres and Jobs & Benefits offices and the Careers Service staff routinely discuss with young people how they can improve their prospects of securing employment by availing, where appropriate, of the programmes offered by my Department. A subsidy under the Steps to Work Programme is available to employers willing to employ 18-24 year olds who have been long term unemployed.

In 2012, in direct response to the economic downturn, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed and introduced a new range of measures, including the Youth Employment Scheme. The focus of the Youth Employment Scheme is early intervention for young people aged 18 to 24 and aims to help this group gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment. The Youth Employment Scheme engages directly with employers who are interested in assisting and supporting young people by helping remove barriers to finding and retaining employment.

In addition my Department has developed and leads on the Executive's cross-departmental strategy 'Pathways to Success' for addressing the needs of young people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). As part of the Strategy, I introduced the Collaboration and Innovation Fund to help unemployed 16 – 24 year old young people who have a diverse range of employability needs.

Special Needs: Dungannon and South Tyrone

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning has he given any consideration to funding the delivery of the pilot of a two year accredited course on training in life and social skills and independence strategies for 19 year olds leaving special needs education, developed and facilitated by experienced staff at Willowbank Ltd, in Dungannon and South Tyrone, (AQW 26242/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department currently offers accredited provision on training in life and social skills and independence strategies for 19 year olds leaving special needs education, across a range of its services and programmes in order to help people make progress in or towards employment.

Whilst my Department has not been approached with regard to Willowbank Ltd's two year accredited course, where external services are required, they will normally be taken forward on a competitive tendering basis, in line with public sector procurement standards.

Employment: Courses for Young People

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail all the courses his Department provides to assist young people seeking employment. (AQW 26282/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides a range of programmes and services to assist people who are unemployed to find and sustain employment.

Steps to Work is my Department's main adult return to work programme which provides participants with the opportunity to achieve a qualification through the provision of Short Accredited Training Courses or a work related vocational qualification. All qualifications delivered must be on the Register of Regulated Qualifications. Assistance is also available within Steps to Work to those participants who have been assessed as having essential skills needs to undertake an approved Essential Skills qualification in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

My Department's Disability Employment Service also provides work based support and assistance for people with a disability of all ages. The range of specialist services aimed at helping people move into and stay in work include:

- Work Connect is a new specialist disability programme, designed to help recipients of Incapacity Benefit and Employment Support Allowance to overcome barriers to employment, improve their employability and, where possible, find and keep suitable employment;
- Access to Work (NI) is a flexible programme designed to help employees and employers overcome employment related obstacles faced by people with disabilities. It can help with a wide variety of supports, primarily through financial assistance for Communication Support at Interview, Special Aids and Equipment, Adaptations to Premises, Support Worker and Travel to Work payments;
- Workable is a programme that provides specialist in-work support to enable people with disabilities to work in a wide variety of jobs. This direct support package is provided by local disability organisations and includes training for the employer and other employees, a dedicated job coach for the candidate, mentoring support and specialist training as necessary.

The Disability Employment Service also funds residential training opportunities at Parkanaur College, near Dungannon, for people with significant disabilities where their needs cannot be met by mainstream Further Education College provision. The College provides vocational training courses in Business Administration/IT, Catering, Upholstery and Horticulture.

In addition, my Department's Youth Employment Scheme provides early and intensive intervention by Employment Service staff with young people, aged 18 to 24 years old. It is a voluntary scheme offered to clients in receipt of Jobseeker's

Allowance and aims to connect the young person with the labour market at the earliest opportunity by equipping them with the tools and skills to compete for jobs, sustain employment and progress in their employment.

The scheme comprises several elements:

- Employment Service Advisers will provide a diagnostic, evidence-based work readiness assessment, including the development of basic "job search" skills such as CV building, application writing, interviewing skills etc;
- opportunities to experience the world of work will be offered through a voluntary Work Experience Programme lasting 3 to 8 weeks. Young people will be given opportunities to further develop employability skills and allow them to trial particular types of work;
- young people will also be offered further careers advice from a qualified Careers Adviser, where appropriate, to identify possible further training opportunities;
- a longer work experience opportunity including skills training is also available where young people will be able to obtain additional relevant qualifications during a 6 month period of work experience.
- My Department's Training for Success Programme is designed for young people aged 16 - 17 (up to 24 years for those who qualify under extended eligibility) and provides training to give them the tools and skills they need to secure employment. This training provides young people with relevant qualifications as well as the required personal and behavioural skills to progress into work.

My Department is also responsible for ApprenticeshipsNI a programme that offers training to 16 year olds and over across a wide range of apprenticeships. This training provides young people with relevant qualifications as well as the required personal and behavioural skills to progress into work.

Strategies, Development Plans and Implementation Plans

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many; (i) strategies; (ii) development plans; and (iii) implementation plans exist within his Department; and to outline the number of recommendations in each.

(AQW 26325/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are currently 13 strategies within my Department. These include strategies already implemented but which remain in place, internal strategies and those with an external focus, and one draft strategy. Together, these strategies contain a total of 233 recommendations, action points or projects.

The Department has 10 implementation plans, comprising 197 recommendations or actions. There are no 'development plans'.

The Department also contributes to the development and delivery of a significant number of wide-ranging inter-Departmental strategies and related action plans, for which other Departments are in the lead. These range from OFMDFM's Delivering Social Change agenda, which encompasses various strategies and action plans to address social inclusion and Section 75 issues, to the Bamford strategy/action plan, which seeks to address the wider societal needs of those with health issues.

South West College: "On Board PLP" Course

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25702/11-15, to provide the specific date a decision was taken to offer the "On Board PLP" course for the 2013/14 academic year; and to clarify how and through which agencies, schools, etc this course was advertised or made known publicly, in particular to those with a relevant interest.

(AQW 26381/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each further education college is responsible for determining its own curriculum and associated provision. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information, requested by the member. I have referred the question to the Director of South West College, who will respond, directly, to the Member.

South West College: Post 19 Transition Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25702/11-15, to detail when the Post 19 Transitions Officers for the area involved were informed of the availability of this course.

(AQW 26467/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each further education college is responsible for planning the delivery of all provision. This incorporates liaising with key stakeholders, including Transitions Officers, as appropriate. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information requested by the member. I have referred the question to the Director of South West College, who will respond, directly, to the member.

South West College: Part-time Provision

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW25524/11-15, to detail the (i) dates of all meetings between the South West Regional College and the affected schools; (ii) reasons for the meetings; and (iii) requests made and concerns raised by the schools, during the last two academic years.

(AQW 26532/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each further education college is responsible for managing its own engagement and communications with local schools. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information, requested by the member. I have referred the question to the Director of South West College, who will respond, directly, to the Member.

Youth Employment Scheme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25743/11-15, to detail how these figures compare with other constituencies.

(AQW 26536/11-15)

Dr Farry: The comparative figures in relation to the Youth Employment Scheme are outlined in the attached table. This information is collated on a local office rather than constituency basis and reflects the position from the launch of the scheme until 27 September 2013.

Constituency	Served by Offices	Employer Agreements Signed	Opportunities Available	Young People taking up Placement	Young People Securing Subsidised Employment
North Antrim	Ballymena Ballymoney	152	223	110	36
South Antrim	Antrim Newtownabbey	115	187	84	19
East Antrim	Larne Carrickfergus	91	143	75	14
East L'Derry	Coleraine Limavady	265	308	197	45
Foyle	Foyle Lisnagelvin	683	740	415	96
West Tyrone	Strabane Omagh	118	135	97	45
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Enniskillen Dungannon	156	200	102	49
Mid Ulster	Magherafelt Cookstown	100	126	67	27
Newry & Armagh	Newry Armagh	123	304	94	26
Upper Bann	Lurgan Portadown Banbridge	278	423	214	58
South Down	Kilkeel Newcastle Downpatrick	144	188	72	17
Lagan Valley	Lisburn Ballynahinch	124	203	103	23
Strangford	Newtownards	56	102	47	13
North Down	Bangor	88	104	68	23
Belfast North	North Belfast	40	109	32	10
Belfast East	Holywood Road	40	88	42	10
Belfast South	Knockbreda Shaftesbury Square	122	327	86	17
Belfast West	Falls Andersonstown Shankill	95	331	185	11
Total		2790	4241	2090	539

Apprenticeships: A-level Students

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to departmental correspondence ref: COR/081/13, to detail any plans he has to ensure that 18 year old A- level students have the same opportunities as 16 year olds when accessing apprenticeships.

(AQW 26540/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision, with employers creating apprenticeship positions and recruiting suitable individuals as apprentices in line with future business needs.

My Department funds the 'off-the-job' training element of an apprenticeship through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. ApprenticeshipsNI aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship where the apprentice, in paid employment from day one, works towards achieving an industry-approved Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship Framework.

The same level of funding is available for apprentices aged both 16 and 18 years old as, for apprentices aged 16 to 24 years old, my Department funds 100% of training costs across all of the 148 frameworks available through ApprenticeshipsNI and provides an Employer Incentive payment on achievement.

Finally, as the member will be aware, in February, I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned and I will be reporting its findings later in the autumn.

Students: Undergraduate Enrolment

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students, who have enrolled in the first year of an undergraduate degree course, from (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the rest of the United Kingdom; and (iii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 26675/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of students who enrolled in the first year of an undergraduate degree course in 2011/12 from Northern Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland is detailed in the table overleaf.

Country of Domicile	Number of Enrolments in NI undergraduate degree course
Northern Ireland	13,836
Great Britain	369
Republic of Ireland	1,118

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 1 It should be noted that the above information relates to enrolments in Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions and is based on full time and part time first degree undergraduate enrolments for 2011/12.

NEETs: South Antrim

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people between 16 and 25 years-old in South Antrim are not in education, employment or training.

(AQO 4747/11-15)

Dr Farry: In gauging the number of young people not in full-time education, employment or training, my Department uses the Labour Force Survey. The Labour Force Survey estimates are derived from a sample survey for Northern Ireland overall and it is not possible to disaggregate the figures further.

Claimant count figures represent a further source of information, in other words the number of those claiming Job Seekers Allowance. Figures for the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency area for August 2013 show that there were 635 claimants aged 24 and under.

My Department has introduced a number of new initiatives to help address youth unemployment, which include provision in South Antrim.

I secured substantial additional funding to implement the 'Pathways to Success' strategy and the 'Youth Employment Scheme'. With a total budget of more than £25 million, the 'Pathways to Success' strategy comprises a three tier package aimed at helping young people aged 16 to 18 years old, particularly those facing barriers to participation, and assisting unemployed young people aged 18-24 more generally. Strands include: a Collaboration and Innovation fund; a Community Family Support Programme; the Local Employment Intermediary Service; a Learner Access Engagement pilot programme; and an Educational Maintenance Allowance.

In addition I introduced the Youth Employment Scheme to offer a new range of measures to address youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. Officials have been marketing the Youth Employment Scheme in the South Antrim area through a series of promotional events and press releases.

Further and Higher Education: Learning Difficulties

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the provision of learning for people with a disability that is delivered by further and higher education institutions.

(AQO 4742/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is my desire to provide excellent educational opportunities for all students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and make the necessary financial support available for these students, so that they can succeed with their studies.

I recently asked my Department to collate information relating to all available further education (FE) provision for students aged 19 and over, with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

That information has shown that the six further FE colleges continue to provide a wide range of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, from Pre-Entry and Entry Level to Level 2.

I have also increased the amount of ring-fenced financial support available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities studying in FE, from £1.5 million to £2 million per annum.

Pre-Entry Training Support Referral is available for school leavers with a disability enrolling on Training for Success; this is to ensure that support needs are identified and measures put in place to address these as soon as possible after commencement of training.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can avail of provision in higher education institutions and can access support through the Disabled Students Allowance. This funding is to help students taking a higher education course to pay for the extra costs, which they may incur as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

Magee Campus: Day Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department has granted permission for the University of Ulster to change the use of the day care facility building, built using European funds, at the Magee campus.

(AQO 4740/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster, like all other universities, is an autonomous body. As such, responsibility for the management of services and decisions relating to University buildings is a matter for the senior management of the University. The University has taken a decision that it wants to change the use of the buildings formerly used to provide day care facilities at its Magee campus.

A condition of the grant from the European Regional Development Fund was that the building would be used for the purpose for which the grant was made for a period of at least 20 years. Since the University has closed the crèche after only 12 years, my Department has decided to exercise its right to reclaim a portion of the European Union grant initially provided to establish the day care facilities.

ICT Action Plan

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the ICT Action Plan.

(AQO 4741/11-15)

Dr Farry: ICT is a priority sector for my Department. In June 2012 I published an Action Plan to address the specific skills issues within the sector. Implementation of the short, medium and long term actions contained in the plan is having a positive impact on the skills shortages in the sector.

Applications to IT-related degrees at our local universities have risen by over 24% in the last year alone and new initiatives continue to be taken forward.

Last month, I announced new pilot academies in Data Analytics and Cloud Technology which will offer training and work placement opportunities to 34 participants. A second cohort of the successful Public/Private ICT Apprenticeship scheme is in motion, with around 50 places available. A further cohort of over 100 students has enrolled on MSc courses for non-IT graduates in our local universities.

Furthermore, a new 'Software and Systems Development' A level has been introduced in Northern Ireland.

Another significant development is the arrangement between e-skills UK, Sentinus and Momentum to raise the awareness and attractiveness of the ICT sector across all levels of education – from primary school right through to university.

I also recently attended a Digital Summit, organised by Momentum, the IT trade association in Northern Ireland. The Summit was extremely positive, attracting involvement from all the stakeholders involved in the ICT sector, including a number of my Ministerial colleagues, to address the issues of access to skills, access to funds and access to markets.

The Summit provided an open forum to discuss the skills requirements of the sector and all stakeholders endorsed the progress being made as a result of the implementation of the ICT Action Plan.

I have committed to consider recommendations discussed at the Summit and ensure the ICT Action Plan is responsive to the needs of the sector.

Employment: Zero-hours Contracts

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what research has been carried out to ascertain the number of people on zero hour contracts.

(AQO 4743/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is currently no Northern Ireland-specific research on the number of people on zero-hours contracts. The only available data is provided through the UK Labour Force Survey, and the Northern Ireland sample is statistically too small to offer a reliable estimate of the number of zero-hours contracts.

There is also no definitive assessment of the number of workers on zero-hours contracts at a UK level. The Labour Force Survey estimates that there are around 250,000 workers on zero-hours contracts in the UK as a whole, whilst the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development provides separate analysis that the number could be up to one million.

I have therefore asked my officials to commission new research, to establish a more reliable estimate of the number of workers on zero-hours contracts and to identify the merits and demerits of using these types of contracts. The purpose of the research is to provide the Department with a more informed understanding of whether there is a need to introduce protections for workers on such contracts.

Priority Skills Achievement

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of how Regional Colleges are performing in terms of priority skills achievement.

(AQO 4744/11-15)

Dr Farry: Statistical analysis for the last two years for which full-year data is available indicates that the regional colleges are performing well in terms of priority skills retention and achievement rates. In the 2011/12 academic year retention and achievement rates were 91% and 87% respectively.

My Department's further education policy has been developed to ensure that colleges have a strong focus on provision that supports the economy, while enhancing social cohesion and advancing individuals' skills and learning.

However, around 98% of the Department's funding to the further education sector was for provision leading to qualifications that are on the regulated qualifications frameworks. Also, the content of professional and technical vocational qualifications on the Qualifications and Credit Framework has been informed by the needs of employers across all sectors.

College enrolments and rates of learner retention, achievement and success are scrutinised through College Development Planning meetings. These take place annually between the Department and individual college Chairs and Directors. These annual meetings also set a range of curriculum targets for further education colleges, including provision that is in Northern Ireland's priority economic sectors.

Higher Education: UCAS

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any recent discussions he has had with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and the Central Applications Office.

(AQO 4745/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's statisticians and economists are in regular contact with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service regarding statistical outputs, data sources, definitions and timetables. The Department has also organised visits to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service for training purposes within the last year.

Discussions are ongoing between the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and the Irish Universities Association in relation to the recognition of A-levels. I have also noted the review of A-levels and GCSEs commissioned by Minister O'Dowd and the consequent issue of mutual recognition of qualifications.

The Graduating to Success project team, leading on cross-border mobility, plans to address this issue through discussions with the Irish Universities Association, the Central Applications Office and the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions.

Inward Investment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the current skills and training programmes in meeting the requirements of potential inward investors.

(AQO 4746/11-15)

Dr Farry: The recent 1,000 jobs announcement by Stream Global Services is a prime example of how my Department's Assured Skills programme, working in partnership with Invest NI ensures that we make the best possible proposition to potential investors. The programme delivers not only a boost to employment but also our local skills base. The Assured Skills programme is now a critical part of any offer made.

The programme leverages all of my responsibilities, including the Employment Service, the higher and further education sectors and our skills and training programmes, with a view to guaranteeing a potential investor that the skills they need to support a growing business can be found in Northern Ireland.

This is achieved firstly by helping companies to find the employees with the right skills for their business and arranging the design of bespoke training if the skills are not readily available.

Following employment, my Department can also help with up-skilling staff through Assured Skills, working with companies to establish what their deficit is and, if necessary, designing a customised solution to meet the need.

In addition, Assured Skills anticipates future needs of inward investors: for example, further education and university lecturers and graduates have been trained in skills of interest to potential investors.

Also, under Assured Skills, we have created academies as a short term intervention to respond to identified needs.

All this activity has meant that, just three years into the programme, Assured Skills has already supported the creation of almost 2,000 jobs across nine projects, with funding of £3.07 million committed from my Department.

Set alongside complementary support from Invest Northern Ireland, I am confident that the joint efforts of Invest Northern Ireland and my Department, through Assured Skills, make Northern Ireland a very attractive location for investment.

Higher Education: BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to explain the apparent difference between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK in the funding of the BA (Hons) Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training degree course to the detriment of Northern Ireland students.

(AQO 4748/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the member will know Higher Education is a devolved matter and therefore Northern Ireland policy will vary in a number of areas compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, examples being, reduced tuition fees and differing rates of maintenance support. However, in relation to the three year Bachelor of Arts Honours Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training degree course, student financial support for Northern Ireland students is in fact broadly similar in terms of tuition fee loans and maintenance support to that offered to students from Great Britain to attend the course in England. The support offered cannot therefore be considered disadvantageous to Northern Ireland students.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: AV Browne and Duffy Rafferty

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of funding provided by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to (i) AV Browne Group; and (ii) Duffy Rafferty Communications since 2010.

(AQW 25362/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has contracts in place with AV Browne Group and Duffy Rafferty Communications to provide specialist services.

Annual gross spend figures are as follows:

	Year:	Amount:
AV Browne Group	2009/10	£ 5,415,301
	2010/11	£ 4,634,022
	2011/12	£ 5,775,091
	2012/13	£ 4,676,793
Sub Total:		£20,501,207
Duffy Rafferty Communications	2009/10	£ 130,337
	2010/11	£ 142,270
	2011/12	£ 156,601
	2012/13	£ 188,085
Sub Total:		£ 617,293
Total:		£21,118,500

Helen's Tower and Somme Museum

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether funding will be made available for the promotion of the Helen's Tower and Somme Museum site in North Down.

(AQW 25554/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets, with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend.

Each year NITB undertakes a series of seasonal marketing campaigns in both markets. The huge variety of products, regions and events featured from throughout Northern Ireland are based on what experiences motivate our key customer segments which have been identified through substantial research.

As part of NITB's campaign recruitment, all accommodation organisations listed on our database, which includes Helen's Tower, are contacted three times per year and encouraged to provide offers to support the campaigns. However, neither Helen's Tower nor The Somme Heritage Centre has contacted NITB directly for promotion and marketing support for their sites. Both products are currently promoted on NITB's consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com.

I would encourage the marketing co-ordinator for Helen's Tower and The Somme Heritage Centre to make contact with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to brief them on what experiences these products can provide for NITB's best prospect visitor segments.

Economic Development and Job Creation: All-island Approach

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential savings to be made through an all-island approach to economic development and job creation.

(AQW 25799/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department works with agencies in the Republic of Ireland where there is a benefit in doing so.

Indeed, Invest NI engages directly with Enterprise Ireland in specific operational areas such as innovation and to explore the potential for cross sectoral engagement in areas such as skills development, construction and agri-food.

In addition, InterTradelreland estimates that it has engaged with over 25,000 SMEs who have utilised the body's business information and advice services, and over 5,000 businesses have taken part in all-island programmes. Through this, it is estimated that more than £650 million worth of trade and business development has been generated, supporting 3,000 jobs as a result of participating on InterTradelreland programmes.

However, it must be recognised that there are limitations to the co-operation we can have, particularly given that Invest NI are in direct competition for inward investment projects.

Labour Training: Joint Promotion

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential savings to be made through the implementation of joint promotion of labour activation measures tailored to specific sectoral needs and potential growth areas.

(AQW 25801/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Member's question relates to labour training, which is not the responsibility of my Department.

Invest NI: Local Offices

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures are in place to ensure that the overall approach taken by, and the products and services available from, local Invest NI offices are standardised.

(AQW 25828/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's network of Regional Offices provide local contact points across Northern Ireland for individuals and businesses seeking to access Invest NI products and services in the local area. These products and services are available across Northern Ireland, and delivered in a consistent manner.

The overall management, communication and training of Invest NI's Regional Office staff is centralised so as to ensure consistency of approach. Invest NI has a range of standardised criteria and processes in place for the delivery of these products, and this also ensures consistency of approach.

Intellectual Property: Renewal Costs

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether it would be beneficial to provide support for renewal costs of intellectual property.

(AQW 25829/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland provides an extensive range of advisory and financial support services to SMEs on the protection and exploitation of Intellectual Property. This includes support for up to 50% of the initial costs of patent or trade

mark registrations in the UK and internationally. These initial costs can be significant e.g. £1,500 for UK, £3,500 for Europe and £2,500 for the US.

Invest NI also provides a range of Intellectual Property advice services including IP Information packs, free of charge patent and trademark searches and free intellectual asset audits.

The annual cost of renewing a UK patent currently varies from £70 in year 5 to £170 in year 10 and £600 in year 20.

It is a commercial decision for each individual or company to decide whether or not to renew a patent each year and providing financial support on these relatively small annual payments would not be justifiable.

It is also worth highlighting that the introduction of the UK Patent Box arrangements this year enables companies to benefit from a lower rate of Corporation Tax on profits earned after 1 April 2013 from patented inventions.

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation: North South Unit

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the level and outcome of her engagement with the North South Unit of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

(AQW 25860/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There is ongoing engagement between my officials and their counterparts in the North South Unit of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Ireland in relation to the development and implementation of the European Interreg IV Programme and InterTradelreland.

Since 2008 my Department has provided funding of over £17million towards 16 Interreg enterprise projects that have also been supported by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

As co-sponsor Department for InterTradelreland, along with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Ireland, my officials also have regular and ongoing contact with the North South Unit, on a range of issues specific to the Body, including financial, operational and policy matters. This engagement also includes formal oversight and liaison meetings.

I also attend Trade and Business Development sectoral meetings hosted by the North South Ministerial Council. The Minister for the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation also attends these meetings.

Cruise Ships: Belfast and Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of cruise ships that have docked in (i) Belfast; and (ii) Londonderry, in each year between from 2007 to 2012.

(AQW 25869/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The following figures have been supplied by Visit Belfast & the Visitor & Convention Bureau in Londonderry:

Year:	Belfast	Londonderry	Total
2007	31	8	39
2008	39	2	41
2009	36	4	40
2010	35	4	39
2011	32	-	32
2012	45	7	52
Total:	218	25	243

DETI: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 25961/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since 2007 there have been one hundred and forty six North South Ministerial Council meetings, including twelve in Plenary and seven in Institutional format, which have been attended by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

There have been twenty eight meetings under the aegis of the British - Irish Council attended by Ministers, including twelve at Summit level.

My Department cannot provide information on other bi-lateral meetings which have taken place outside the remit of the NSMC or BIC involving myself or DETI officials due to disproportionate costs.

Renewable Energy: Subsidies

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount paid in subsidies for renewable energy production, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 26140/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Support for renewable electricity generation is provided under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) in the form of Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation Certificates (NIROCs). As the NIRO is a market-based support mechanism, the actual value of a NIROC to a generator will depend on the supply and demand for NIROCs during a given obligation period, and the individual arrangements reached between generators and the supplier or other person to whom they sell their NIROCs. Table 1 sets out the approximate value of NIROCs issued in each of the last three financial years. Totals for the all three Renewables Obligations (NIRO, Renewables Obligation Scotland and Renewables Obligation England & Wales) are provided in brackets.

Table 1

Year	NIROCs issued*	ROC value (buyout price plus 10%)	Total
2010-11	787,050 (24,884,608)	£40.68	£32,017,194 (£1,012,305,853)
2011-12	1,239,132 (34,753,771)	£42.55	£52,725,066 (£1,556,273,865)
2012-13	1,234,773 (44,243,905)	£44.78	£55,293,134 (£1,981,242,065)

* Source: Ofgem RO Annual Reports and Ofgem ROC Register

A total of £470,000 was paid out or accrued by DETI in 2012/13 (the first year of operation) for renewable heat production under the Renewable Heat Premium Payment scheme and the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive.

Small Business Enterprise

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any plans his Department have to promote and develop small business enterprise courses as part of a wider entrepreneurship development scheme within the Small and Medium Sized Enterprise sector.

(AQW 26155/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Regional Start Initiative is an existing small business enterprise programme focussed on encouraging potential entrepreneurs to produce a business plan as one of the key early steps to starting a business and moving into self-employment. The programme is currently operational and is available across all of Northern Ireland.

As part of the Regional Start Initiative we offer entrepreneurs:

- An Initial Assessment Meeting (One-to-One)
- Business Planning Workshops (Group, maximum 6 hours)
- Financial Business Planning (One-to-One, minimum 3 hours)

In addition, Invest NI provides advice and financial support to start ups and first time exporters through programmes such as Propel and the Social Entrepreneurship Programme.

Councils are also developing a wide range of enterprise programmes, with support from Invest NI under the LED Measure of European Competitiveness Funding. During the past three years, Invest NI has co-funded more than 70 enterprise related programmes and initiatives with Councils across Northern Ireland.

Invest NI continues to review and refresh its approaches to enterprise development, based on feedback from customers, and following reviews of best practice.

The Department for Employment and Learning's Success Through Skills: Transforming Futures Strategy, and the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy focuses on the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy highlighting the importance of developing managers to achieve this. A range of fully funded management and leadership programmes are offered across all levels (first line, middle and senior) to Northern Ireland companies and social enterprises. Work is also being developed specifically to support micro-businesses.

Broadband: County Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the improvements made to broadband provision in the (i) Greencastle; (ii) Glenhull; (iii) Broughderg; and (iv) Mountfield areas of Co. Tyrone; and whether any more work will be undertaken in these areas to further improve broadband coverage.

(AQW 26264/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has made significant public investment over the last 4 years aimed at increasing the reach and improving the quality of broadband services across Northern Ireland.

This investment included the Next Generation Broadband Project which, in conjunction with BT, upgraded a total of 1265 street cabinets across Northern Ireland, including 80 in the West Tyrone Area with fibre-to-the-cabinet technology (FTTC), thus significantly improving broadband services across the region. This investment, coupled with BT's own investment, makes Northern Ireland a leader in telecoms infrastructure not only within the UK, but across Europe.

Through the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund, my Department has also encouraged the deployment of fixed wireless services across mainly rural areas of Northern Ireland. Both North West Electronics (NWE) and NET1 have coverage in the West Tyrone area.

A satellite broadband service is also available under DETI's contract with Onwave Ltd. Onwave offers a range of broadband solutions providing up to 20 Megabits per second satellite services.

As you are aware, my Department has initiated the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP), which aims to provide a 2Mbps broadband service to virtually all premises in Northern Ireland and 24Mbps superfast broadband to 90% of premises by 2015.

It is intended that this project will move to the procurement stage in early October, with a contract expected to be signed by the end of the year and implementation completed by March 2015.

This project will benefit a number of rural areas within Northern Ireland including rural West Tyrone.

Operating Licences: Compliance Plans

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to Condition 12 of the operating licences for Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) and the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI), to detail where the Compliance Plans, that outline the steps being taken or to be taken by the respective licensee to meet the requirements of that condition for NIE and SONI, were published, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26316/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Handling of the Compliance Plans is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, not my Department.

Pursuant to my response to AQW 25208/11-15, I wish to advise that the Utility Regulator has clarified that compliance plans are published if and when amendments to a compliance plan are made and not on an annual basis. The Regulator has also advised that there have been no updated compliance plans published for either licensee in the last five years.

System Operator for Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assurances has she obtained, and from whom, regarding jobs at the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) as well as the maintenance of the SONI identity, in the same respect as assurances she obtained on jobs at Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) and maintenance of the identity of NIE; and to detail how many meetings she has had with ESB and Eirgrid in relation to this.

(AQW 26317/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer to AQW 25211 11/15 in which I indicated that the SONI licence requires that the business has adequate financial and other resources to conduct its operations. I am informed that SONI's published and publicly available accounts show an increase in the number of its employees from 73 in September 2009 (the first set of accounts filed following its acquisition by EirGrid) to 106 (as per the most recent filed accounts dated 30 September 2012).

In relation to meetings, I refer to my response to AQW 25210 11/15.

EirGrid: Board Members

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation the appointment of the EirGrid Board Members from Northern Ireland, to detail (i) the input she had in the appointment; (ii) whether the decision was only taken by the relevant Irish Government Minister; and (iii) the selection process and criteria used for the appointment.

(AQW 26318/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I had no involvement in the process.

System Operator: EirGrid

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, now that the Transmission System Operator Business in Northern Ireland is fully under the control of the Eirgrid Executive Directors based in Dublin and the Eirgrid Group Board has embarked on a strategy of full integration with the goal of a seamless all-Ireland Transmission System Operator Business, for her assessment of whether the Strategy is positive for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 26319/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer to my response to AQW 25202 11/15 and AQW 25208 11/15.

System Operator for Northern Ireland: Operator Licence

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the monitoring of the Northern Ireland Electricity Transmission and Distribution licences and the System Operator for Northern Ireland Transmission System Operator licence, with respect to specific conditions relating to provision of undertakings by the ultimate owners to ensure the independence of decision making and availability of resources to conduct their business, is reported publically, and if so, (i) where; and (ii) by what process.

(AQW 26320/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The monitoring of electricity licence obligations is a matter for the Utility Regulator.

Broadband: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the progress of broadband provision in North Down.

(AQW 26332/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Further to my response to AQW 25075/11-15, the 2nd consultation on the Northern Ireland Broadband Project (NIBIP) has recently been completed.

The results are currently being analysed, to ensure that any intervention complies with strict State Aid rules.

It is intended that this project will move to the procurement stage in early October, with a contract expected to be signed by the end of the year and completion expected by March 2015.

This project will benefit a number of areas across Northern Ireland, including the North Down area.

Gas Storage: Islandmagee

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the development of gas storage facilities in Islandmagee, to detail (i) the parties that are involved in the development; and (ii) the projected cost of the project for local consumers.

(AQW 26386/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The project is being developed by Islandmagee Storage Ltd, currently owned by InfraStrata UK Limited, together with Moyle Energy Investments Limited, a subsidiary of Mutual Energy Limited. In addition, BP Gas Marketing Ltd. has an option to take a holding in the project.

The project is a commercial venture and should not result in any increase in costs for consumers, rather it should benefit all consumers by enhancing security of supply and providing additional gas at times of high gas demand.

Gas Storage: Islandmagee

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the viability of the proposed gas storage project at Islandmagee, given that the Centrica has recently pulled out of plans to develop two large gas storage projects in Great Britain blaming lack of government subsidies and weak economics.

(AQW 26389/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Islandmagee gas storage project is being developed as a commercial venture, without government subsidy. The developers of the project are continuing to work towards obtaining the necessary consents and regulatory arrangements for the project.

There may however be potential for such projects to benefit from EU funding under the EU Infrastructure Regulation as a Project of Common Interest.

Gas Storage: Islandmagee

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether it is viable to pursue gas storage in Islandmagee and gas fracking in Co. Fermanagh, which could also be viewed as a form of gas storage.

(AQW 26390/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Irrespective of any proposals for shale gas development in Co. Fermanagh, a gas storage facility at Islandmagee would provide enhanced security of gas supply for Northern Ireland in the event of a disruption in the supply of gas and provide additional gas at times of peak demand.

Tap Water in Catering Establishments

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there are any plans for legislation that would guarantee tap water being available in catering establishments.

(AQW 26401/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no plans to introduce legislation that would guarantee tap water being available in catering establishments.

Invest NI: Energy Efficiency

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps Invest NI is taking to drive energy efficiency in local businesses.

(AQW 26422/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI offers a range of support to drive business energy efficiency and assist the management of energy costs including technical advice, energy efficiency audits, and project management support to help implement effective cost saving opportunities.

Invest NI can also provide financial assistance to Large Energy Users that bring forward proposals for capital expenditure on equipment that will make a significant impact on energy efficiency. In terms of smaller companies, Invest NI funds council initiatives to assist small businesses to undertake a variety of energy efficient projects.

Invest NI provides the funding for the Energy Efficiency Loan Fund which is delivered on its behalf by the Carbon Trust and offers interest-free loans of up to £400,000 to enable businesses to install more energy efficient equipment. It has along with Manufacturing Northern Ireland and Carbon Trust also recently launched 'Energy Independence', aimed at helping companies improve energy efficiency and consider adopting renewable energy technologies.

Biomass: Subsidies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether subsidies for biomass disincentivises energy efficiency; and if so, what measures can be taken to combat this.

(AQW 26425/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is very keen to promote energy efficiency alongside incentives for renewable heat technologies, such as biomass, as it is widely recognised that energy efficiency measures can be the most cost effective method for reducing energy bills. Indeed my Department has sought to promote positive energy efficiency behaviours through the EnergyWise campaign.

In designing the domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) DETI has included energy efficiency assumptions that will ensure that the tariffs are most appropriate and most beneficial for those that have already carried out energy efficiency improvements in their homes. In addition, by proposing to 'deem' payments there is a further incentive for those installing biomass under the future domestic RHI to be as efficient as possible. In addition, the existing Renewable Heat Premium Payment (RHPP) scheme does however have prescriptive eligibility requirements regarding loft and cavity wall insulation.

Again, within the existing RHI for commercial premises it is assumed that the installation of a biomass boiler, or another renewable technology, would be the final action taken by a business seeking to become 'low-carbon', with the costs involved in installing renewable heating much greater than those involved with simple energy efficiency measures

Invest NI: Game of Thrones

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how much Invest NI provided in grants to attract Game of Thrones; (ii) the estimated economic benefit of Game of Thrones; (iii) which body calculates the estimated economic benefit; and (iv) the method used to calculate the economic benefit.

(AQW 26428/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI offers a range of support to drive business energy efficiency and assist the management of energy costs including technical advice, energy efficiency audits, and project management support to help implement effective cost saving opportunities.

Invest NI can also provide financial assistance to Large Energy Users that bring forward proposals for capital expenditure on equipment that will make a significant impact on energy efficiency. In terms of smaller companies, Invest NI funds council initiatives to assist small businesses to undertake a variety of energy efficient projects.

Invest NI provides the funding for the Energy Efficiency Loan Fund which is delivered on its behalf by the Carbon Trust and offers interest-free loans of up to £400,000 to enable businesses to install more energy efficient equipment. It has along with Manufacturing Northern Ireland and Carbon Trust also recently launched 'Energy Independence', aimed at helping companies improve energy efficiency and consider adopting renewable energy technologies.

- i Invest NI, through its funding support to the Northern Ireland Screen Commission (NI Screen), has provided £10.9million of financial assistance to Home Box Office (HBO). This funding has helped to secure the pilot episode of HBO's Game of Thrones in 2009 and the first four series.
- ii. The estimated economic impact of Game of Thrones, as measured by Gross Value Added and employment, is expected to exceed £80million. This includes all expenditure generated in the local economy such as wages and salaries of Northern Ireland resident cast and crew, hotels, facilities hire, transport hire, construction costs, etc. Over the period 2009-2013, Game of Thrones has created 941 Full Time Equivalent jobs. It should be noted that this figure does not include those employed on shorter term daily contracts.

The full economic benefit of Game of Thrones is much greater when coupled with the wider and regional benefits that have been derived to date. These wider benefits include increasing the overall reputation of the Northern Ireland Screen Industry on the national and international stage; helping to attract new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); development of new film tourism opportunities; increase in NI's skills capacity; wider supply chain benefits (e.g. airlines, restaurants, etc).

- iii. The economic benefit has been assessed independently by external appraisers including KPMG, Deloitte and Cogent Management Consultants. Typically, this is undertaken as an element of the interim and final economic evaluation of NI Screen's four year funding cycle.
- iv. The method used to calculate economic benefit is compliant with:
 - The Green Book: Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government, HM Treasury, 2003;
 - The Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation, DFP, 2009;
 - The Magenta Book: Guidance for Evaluation; and
 - Invest NI Economic Appraisal Methodology (EAM) Guidance.

Councils: Closure of Facilities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any evidence of a growing trend in councils of closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis; and if any funded activities are under pressure from closure or additional funding requirements.

(AQW 26444/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Neither my Department nor The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has any specific evidence of a growing trend in councils of closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis.

The closure of council facilities is a matter for each individual council.

Exploris

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the decision by Ards Borough Council to defer the closure of Exploris for two months, to outline her Department's plans to assist in securing the facilities.

(AQW 26535/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Ards Borough Council has owned and operated Exploris since 1987. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has provided a total of £1,841,777 of financial support to Exploris over the period for capital, marketing and other schemes.

While not in a position to provide revenue funding for Exploris, NITB recognises the importance of the Aquarium as a major tourist attraction in the Strangford Lough area and would encourage Ards Borough Council to try to find a suitable solution to keep this facility operational.

NITB and Invest Northern Ireland are currently exploring options for other support, if any exists, that they may be in a position to offer Ards Borough Council in support of Exploris.

Electricity: Small-scale Generation

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the ongoing work between her Department, Northern Ireland Electricity and the Utility Regulator to address the shortcomings being experienced by successful applications of small scale generation projects that are unable to connect to the grid.

(AQW 26548/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware that the increasing amount of small scale renewable electricity generation is placing a strain on the distribution network and that NIE has been in discussions with the Utility Regulator to identify a solution to the problem. My Department has observer status on the Utility Regulator-led Renewables Grid Liaison Group, which also includes representation from NIE and industry. The Group is exploring solutions which are within NIE's licence requirements and that minimise the cost to the consumer.

Social Enterprise Projects

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding has been set aside for new social enterprise projects in the next two years.

(AQW 26549/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI leads, on behalf of the Executive, on the development of social economy policy for Northern Ireland. This is taken forward through a cross departmental Social Economy Policy Group (SEPG) which includes representatives from several Executive departments which will be delivering their own social enterprise projects.

In October 2012, DETI appointed Social Enterprise Northern Ireland to design, manage and deliver a Social Economy Work Programme (SEWP), for up to a maximum of three years. The main objective of the SEWP is to develop and implement a programme of initiatives to enable the continued growth of a sustainable social economy sector.

DETI's contribution to the SEWP is £150,000 per annum for up to three years. This will be the key mechanism for DETI's support for the sector moving forward.

In addition Invest Northern Ireland has two programmes that aim to support new social enterprise projects. The Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) supports the development of social enterprise start-ups across Northern Ireland and the Social Enterprise Franchise Programme is a pilot programme to assist both potential franchisees and franchisors to take forward new business opportunities. Invest NI funding to these two programmes is £1.578 million until March 2015.

DETI/Invest Northern Ireland is also working in partnership with the Department for Social Development (DSD) to deliver the Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs (SEIH) signature project within the Delivering Social Change (DSC) initiative. This is the development of up to 11 social enterprise hubs with support for a two year period from 2014 at a cost of £4 million.

Hydraulic Fracturing: County Fermanagh

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail who granted Tamboran a licence to carry out hydraulic fracturing on land owned by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Co. Fermanagh.
(AQW 26568/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No Licence has been awarded in Northern Ireland for hydraulic fracturing. DETI awarded Petroleum Licence PL2/10 to Tamboran Resources Limited on 1 April 2011 for an initial 5-year term. The license area covers part of County Fermanagh.

Hydraulic Fracturing: County Fermanagh

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the location and ownership of the land that is included in the licence that has been granted for hydraulic fracturing in Co. Fermanagh.
(AQW 26569/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 26568, which explained that there are no licences granted for hydraulic fracturing in Northern Ireland.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Licences

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any further hydraulic fracturing licences have been applied for, and granted to, companies covering forests.
(AQW 26570/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the answers I gave to AQW 26568 and AQW 26569 which he also submitted. My Department does not grant licences for hydraulic fracturing. DETI has awarded one Petroleum Licence, PL2/10, in County Fermanagh, where the intention of the Licensee is to explore for shale gas. No other applications for Petroleum Licences in which the target would be shale gas have been received.

Giro d'Italia 2014

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the recent announcement that the route of the Giro d'Italia 2014 will not include the Mournes.
(AQW 26571/11-15)

Mrs Foster: RCS Sport, the event owners, have the ultimate say in where any stage of the race route goes. Shadetree Sports, as the local organiser of the Big Start, have been consulting with RCS on the potential stage routes since the very beginning of the bid process.

Above all else, this is a professional sporting event and sporting considerations have to be paramount during the decision making process.

Road races and time trials require different types of road to fit the disciplines whilst the nature of the road closures, which an event of this size has, also comes into play in a critical manner.

You will understand that there are many areas of the country that are not included and it would be impossible for the event to go through every area of Northern Ireland so that everybody has the race passing through their locality.

The route that will be announced on Monday 7 October 2013 in Milan, Italy is the agreed route that RCS Sport and all of the partners in Northern Ireland have agreed on. A lot of work has gone into getting these stages right from a Giro d'Italia point of view. When an event comes this far away from its home base, we must take care to look after their interests and ensure the central sporting considerations of the race are met.

Electricity: Winter Conditions

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what preparations have been made for potential difficult winter conditions in relation to maintaining electricity supplies.

(AQW 26645/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The annual Winter Outlook for 2013-2014 published on 20 August 2013 on the SONI and EirGrid websites clearly indicates that there should be sufficient generation capacity this winter to ensure an appropriate level of security of electricity supply is maintained in Northern Ireland.

DETI keeps in close contact with SONI throughout the year, which includes an ongoing review on resilience, and is due to meet with the Northern Ireland gas, electricity, and oil sectors over the next two months for the annual pre-winter planning reviews.

Green Investment Bank: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what funding opportunities, through the Green Investment Bank, can be progressed to the benefit of companies in North Down.

(AQW 26704/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 26257/11-15

Invest NI: Stream

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why Invest NI awarded £3 million of public money to Stream Global Services to locate in Belfast when the company has reduced its services in the North West over the last number of years.

(AQW 26724/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI offered LBM Direct Marketing £2,879,700 of support towards the creation of 993 new jobs, which when fully staffed will deliver £14million of wages and salaries into the Northern Ireland economy. This support was offered under the Jobs Fund which was set up to create jobs quickly, and as of this week almost 600 of the 993 posts are filled.

LBM Direct Marketing was acquired by Stream in February 2013. Stream decided it would continue with LBM's planned investment in Belfast.

Department of the Environment

Dereliction Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the rationale behind his Department's change in policy from funding and tackling dereliction to taking enforcement action in relation to dilapidated buildings, neglected sites and defective properties.

(AQW 26035/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): There has not been a change in policy.

The Department's Dereliction Intervention Funding Programme, is intended to assist councils to remove and reduce the impact of eyesores in a limited number of townscape sites and/or when significant public events are impending. This has the twin benefits of reducing blight spread, and providing a more aesthetically pleasing environment for visitors and local residents. In the main it is of a cosmetic nature and can be of more short term impact.

However, I am aware that some aspects of the current legislation dealing with dilapidated buildings, neglected sites and defective properties in Northern Ireland may need to be strengthened to enable district councils to tackle problems in this area more effectively. I have, therefore, initiated a work programme within the Department to consider the current legislation and to bring forward proposals to, if appropriate, strengthen that legislation. Any proposals to change the legislation would be subject to full public consultation before any final decisions on the way forward are made.

I would see any change in legislation as complementing the Dereliction Intervention Scheme and assisting councils in tackling dilapidated and neglected sites.

Planning Applications: Regulation 10

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to planning application E/2013/0093/F, why it took two months from the receipt of the application for his Department to decide that it required EIA screening; and whether this decision was as a result of concerns raised by objectors over his Department's failure to carry out an EIA determination in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Planning (Environmental Impact) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

(AQW 26038/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Committee for the Environment's report identified 12 recommendations for implementation by the Department. These contain legislative, policy, regulatory and enforcement proposals which may require amendments of legislation or policy and will in some cases require consultation with the tyre sector. The recommendations impose short, medium and long term actions upon the Department.

Two of the recommendations relate to improving waste data for tyre arisings in Northern Ireland. NIEA is currently reviewing its data collection and collation systems for controlled wastes, including waste tyres. This will require additional resources and the development and enhancement of databases.

The Committee has also recommended that NIEA recruit additional enforcement staff. A recruitment programme is ongoing and the Agency hopes to have new staff shortly. The Environmental Crime Unit in NIEA has already recruited a number of staff and these are now in post. The aim will be to provide more robust monitoring and auditing of the waste tyre sector and enforcement of offenders.

A further recommendation requires the review and updating of waste tyre exemptions. The Agency is looking at all registered exemptions and this will include waste tyre activities.

The Committee has asked that the Department investigate the Registered Waste Carrier and Duty of Care legislation with the view to implementing an electronic system of compliance. There is presently a UK wide project in relation to an electronic Duty of Care system (eDOC) which is being tested by industry. NIEA has also recently revised its Relevant Convictions Policy. The Department intends to shortly introduce further legal requirements for Duty of Care and Waste Carriers.

The Committee considered alternative uses and new technologies as part of its Used Tyre inquiry. A recommendation in the report is the production of clear application forms and guidance for End of Waste and that these applications should be processed promptly. The Agency has set up a Policy Team to implement this recommendation.

The Committee listed several recommendations requesting the Department consider an all island producer responsibility mechanism for waste tyres. The Department is waiting for the outcome of the ROI review of its PR scheme before it progresses this recommendation. The Committee also suggested an interim compliance measure. The NIEA has been liaising with the tyre retailer association to progress this recommendation.

Waste: Recycling, Landfill and Incineration

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his departmental targets for the percentage of total waste that should be (i) recycled; (ii) landfilled; and (iii) incinerated by 2020.

(AQW 26040/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department's soon to be published revised Waste Management Strategy for Northern Ireland "Delivering Resource Efficiency" sets out targets and actions aimed at reducing our reliance on landfill by reducing the amount of waste we generate and recycling and recovering a larger proportion. The Strategy reflects both European and National targets and specific commitments in the NI Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015. It does not contain an overall target for the percentage of all NI waste to be recycled, landfilled, or incinerated.

Specific Strategy targets for recycling are as follows:

- To achieve a recycling rate (including preparing for re-use) of 45% by 2015;
- To achieve a recycling rate (include preparation for re-use) of 50% household waste by 2020;
- To achieve a recycling rate of 60% (including preparing for re-use) of Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste by 2020;
- To achieve a recovery rate (including preparing for re-use, recycling and other material recovery of 70% for all non-hazardous construction and demolition waste by 2020;
- To achieve an overall recovery rate of 79% and overall recycling rate of 72.7% of packaging by 2017;
- To achieve all the recovery and recycling targets for all categories of EEE as set out in the recast WEEE Directive; and
- To achieve an overall re-use, recycling and recovery rate for end of life vehicles of 95% by 2015.

Specific Strategy targets for landfill are as follows:

- To landfill no more than 220,000 tonnes of biodegradable Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste by 2020 (under the Northern Ireland Landfill Allowances Scheme (NILAS))
- To meet the Article 5 Landfill Directive target of landfilling no more than 429,000 tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste by 2020.

The Strategy does not contain targets for the incineration of waste. However, the Department supports efficient energy recovery from residual waste through incineration in accordance with the waste hierarchy.

Road Safety: Cyclists

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, given the increase in the number of cyclists using rural roads, what plans he has to enhance road safety for cyclists.

(AQW 26043/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

I believe that reducing further all deaths and serious injuries on our roads, with the ultimate ambition of 'Vision Zero', where any death is unacceptable, is an important and achievable objective.

Between 2008 and 2012, six cyclists died on our roads. So far this year three cyclists have died. In 2012, 55 cyclists were seriously injured, an increase from 36 in 2003. The rate of Pedal Cyclist deaths and serious injuries per 100 million kilometres cycled in 2011, the latest figures available, was 77, an increase of 28% on the 2004-2008 baseline of 60.

Drivers are responsible for the majority of collisions, with the main causes being speeding, drink driving and inattention on our roads. Changing the attitudes and behaviours of drivers is therefore the most effective way of protecting all road users and our campaigns concentrate on changing such behaviours. The Road Safety Strategy recognises cyclists as a vulnerable road user group and includes a range of actions that relate to cyclists' safety.

In October 2011, the Department launched the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign to remind drivers and cyclists to pay attention when sharing the road. This campaign consists of two radio messages and bus back posters.

In May 2012, a campaign was launched to encourage road users to 'respect everyone's journey'. The important safety messages to drivers will benefit all vulnerable road user groups, including cyclists.

In September 2012, a campaign was launched, focusing on wider road user responsibility, urging all road users to take responsibility for their actions on the road. The television, press and online campaign includes an injured cyclist saying "I was cycling in the bike lane. The driver said the sun was in his eyes."

A further campaign, launched on 24 April 2013, invites everyone to 'Share the Road to Zero'. This is aimed at all road user groups – cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists, drivers and passengers and, indeed, focuses heavily on cyclists in the opening scenes. The aim is to get every road user to take personal responsibility for helping to prevent deaths on Northern Ireland's roads. The social media aspect of this campaign provides appropriately targeted road safety messages to subscribers. This can be found at www.sharetheroadtozero.com

A 'Cycling Skills & Cycling Safety' guide, developed jointly by DOE and DRD, is available in hard copy and online and provides information on the benefits of cycling, on basic safety requirements and on the rules of the road.

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme is offered by the DOE Road Safety Education Officer Service to every primary school in Northern Ireland. Over 530 Primary Schools participate in the scheme each year, with approximately 8,365 children benefiting from the scheme annually.

Rules 204 to 218 in the Highway Code provide advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, with extra care and attention. Advice specifically for cyclists can be found in Rules 59-82.

Given a rise in cyclist casualties, the Department is currently analysing available data and has commissioned qualitative research to help inform consideration of potential new educational activity around cyclist safety.

I recognise the continuing challenges of reducing casualties on our roads, and will take forward further actions as appropriate from this analysis and research.

Reusable Bags: Disposal

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the research or evidence base that determined the level of disposal of reusable bags; and the evidence gathered to attribute levels of disposal by consumers to the cost of bags.
(AQW 26062/11-15)

Mr Durkan: From the outset, the Department's initial modelling work confirmed that the carrier bag levy needed to be extended to low cost reusable bags, to maximise environmental benefits. Otherwise, the relatively low price of low cost reusable bags would lead some people to treat them as single use bags – and discard them prematurely. Since low cost reusable bags are usually of a higher gauge, this would cause even greater harm than discarded single use bags.

The Department had predicted that the implementation of the levy on single use bags would generate around a 70% increase in sales of low cost reusable bags. Increased sales of such bags is both expected and welcomed – but only provided that customers actively reuse such bags to their full potential.

In Wales, data provided by 5 large retailers suggest that sales of low cost reusable bags have increased by 120-130%. Anecdotal evidence presented to the Department suggests that the same trends are occurring in Northern Ireland. However, a recent local survey shows that only 56% of shoppers in Northern Ireland regularly reuse their carrier bags – suggesting that there is significant room for improvement in shopping behaviour.

I believe that this information reinforces the rationale for extending the levy to low cost reusable bags, in line with original policy direction. I should also point out that the legislation will still give retailers the freedom to operate a bag-for-life policy, replacing worn-out plastic reusable bags free of charge. This should help reinforce positive environmental behaviour.

It is abundantly clear that, in Northern Ireland, the 5 pence levy has significantly reduced sales of new single use bags. In the same way, an increase in the price of new low cost reusable bags should help reduce unnecessary purchases of these bags. This should help prevent a scenario in which large numbers of new reusable bags are purchased and discarded prematurely.

I believe that by extending the levy to reusable bags costing under 20 pence and maintaining the option for retailers to operate a bag-for-life policy, we can drive up the frequency with which all carrier bags are reused, build on the success of the single use carrier bag levy and maximise the overall environmental benefit.

Highway Code: Cyclists

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the legal enforceability of the Highway Code as it pertains to measures to protect cyclists.

(AQW 26063/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory responsibility under Article 51 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to promote road safety and specifically to make available the Highway Code. The Highway Code reflects current Northern Ireland legislation but has no power in itself to change or introduce any legislation. It does, however, provide rules, techniques and advice essential for all road users. A bicycle is legally a vehicle and a cyclist is a driver, so therefore a cyclist is required to obey all the standard rules of the road.

Many of the rules in the Highway Code are legal requirements, and if you disobey these rules you are committing a criminal offence. You may be fined, given penalty points on your licence or be disqualified from driving. In the most serious cases you may be sent to prison. Such rules are identified by the use of the words 'MUST/MUST NOT'. Each of these rules includes an abbreviated reference to the legislation which creates the offence – an explanation of the abbreviations can be found on page 123 of the Code.

Article 51(6) of the 1995 Order provides that while failure to comply with any provision of the Code will not, in itself, cause a person to be prosecuted, the Highway Code may be used in evidence in any court proceedings under road traffic legislation (listed on page 123) to establish or to negative any liability. This includes rules that use advisory wording such as 'should/should not' or 'do/do not'.

This wording is used throughout the Highway Code including the sections which pertain specifically to cyclists. The first of these sections contains 'Rules for Cyclists' and includes information on issues such as appropriate clothing and lighting as well as advice when cycling on cycle routes, cycle tracks, cycle lanes and bus lanes. The correct procedures to be followed at road junctions, roundabouts and crossing the road are also covered alongside other important safety requirements (Rules 59 to 82).

The Code also makes it very clear that the most vulnerable road users are pedestrians, particularly children, older or disabled people, cyclists, motorcyclists and horse riders. Advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, is covered in Rules 204 to 218 of the Code.

A further section entitled 'You and your bicycle' considers some of the factors that will help make sure that you feel confident of your ability to ride safely on the road. This advice can be found in Annex 1 of the Code (page 118).

The rules, techniques and advice contained in the Highway Code for Northern Ireland are there to help us all to use the roads both safely and legally. There is no doubt, if all road users know and follow this advice then many collisions would be avoided and the Road to Zero road deaths would be advanced.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment when he will amend the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations to comply with the Court of Justice of the European Union decision on case number C-50/09.

(AQW 26098/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The decision in Case c-50/09 – (Commission v Ireland) and a related UK Court of Appeal judgment in *SAVE Britain's Heritage v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Lancaster City Council*, which concluded that demolition works come within the scope of the EIA Directive, were implemented in September 2012 by an amendment to the Department's Direction on Demolition and Development and to the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 ("the GDO").

The changes to the Department's Direction brought the demolition of all buildings with some minor exceptions under planning control. To ensure that the planning system was not overburdened with unnecessary planning applications for the demolition of relatively insignificant buildings the Department also introduced permitted development rights for the demolition of buildings. However, by virtue of an earlier amendment to the GDO made by the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999 these were only granted up to the point where demolition reached the EIA threshold so that permitted development rights would not be granted where the proposal required environmental scrutiny under the EIA regulations.

Following the consolidation and updating of the EIA Regulations in 2012, my Department gave consideration to the status of the earlier amendment to the GDO made under the 1999 EIA Regulations. To clarify and confirm the position and to reiterate the extent of permitted development rights, including demolition, in respect of EIA requirements, a further amendment was made to the GDO, which came into operation on 30th August 2013. The inserted provision provides that the GDO cannot grant planning permission for development falling within the scope of the EIA Regulations unless the Department of the Environment has determined that the proposed development is not EIA development.

Aarhus Convention

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment when Northern Ireland will sign the Aarhus Convention.
(AQW 26099/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Aarhus Convention was ratified on a UK-wide basis on 24 February 2005 and, in line with the Convention's procedures, became a full party to the Convention 90 days after this date, in May 2005. Northern Ireland, is, therefore, already 'signed up' to the Convention and has complied with its requirements by transposing and implementing the relevant EU legislation.

Habitat Regulations

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment when he will amend the Habitat regulations to comply with The Court of Justice of the European Union decision on case number 256/11.
(AQW 26106/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The court judgement in question (*Sweetman V An Bord Pleanála*) concerned the interpretation of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive as applied to the process by which the Irish Planning Board reached its decision to give approval to a road scheme, part of which was planned to cross a Special Area of Conservation. It did not concern any legal lacuna in the relevant Irish transposing legislation. The Department does not consider that there are any legislative implications arising from this case, therefore amending regulations are not required.

Waste to Energy Incineration

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's strategy or plan for the capacity of local waste to energy incineration.
(AQW 26128/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department's soon to be published revised Waste Management Strategy for Northern Ireland "Delivering Resource Efficiency" sets out targets and actions aimed at reducing the amount of waste we generate and recycling and recovering a larger proportion to reduce our reliance on landfill. It reflects both European and National targets and specific commitments in the NI Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015. The Strategy recognises that efficient energy recovery from residual waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy, whether through a cement kiln, incinerator or gasifier, can contribute to meeting NI's non-fossil fuel obligations and Government policies on renewable energy, as well as meeting landfill diversion targets.

The Department's priority is to secure a reasonable level of assurance of compliance with landfill diversion targets for 2020. It is for each Waste Management Group to determine the optimum scale of their proposed facilities in order to meet their councils' landfill diversion targets whilst maximising recycling in accordance with the waste hierarchy.

Single-use Carrier Bag Levy

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department plans to use the single-use carrier bag levy returns for local businesses.
(AQW 26132/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Now that the first quarter carrier bag levy returns have been received, I will announce plans for the use of the levy funds in the next few weeks.

Local Government: Review of Public Administration

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Review of Public Administration which is due to become operational in 2015.
(AQO 4609/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Local Government Reform programme remains on target for 1 April 2015. The new councils will be equipped with a tested, robust and comprehensive legislative and operational framework.

Earlier today the Local Government Bill was introduced into the Assembly. This is a major step in the legislative process that will make local government reform a reality and will provide the legislative framework necessary to give effect to the Executive's decisions on the future shape of local government.

The regulations which introduced the severance scheme for councillors came into operation on 1 August 2013. The main components of the scheme include a minimum eligibility period of 12 years (cumulatively), graduated yearly payments to ensure that those with longer periods of service are treated fairly and proportionately, and a cap on individual payments of £35,000.

A Commencement Order, which will bring the boundaries of the 11 new local government districts into effect for the purposes of holding the next local government elections and to allow the new councils to prepare an annual budget and strike a rate for the 2015/16 financial year, will be made by the end of September.

Ten statutory transition committees have been established to drive convergence between the merging councils and also prepare for the new incoming councils operating in shadow form next year. I have written to Belfast City Council about their nominations to a Belfast Statutory Transition Committee, which has not yet formed. I have also written to some councils where there are issues around proportional representation. The work of the new committees includes corporate, financial and business planning and also the appointment of chief executives to lead the change management process. The Department has issued guidance to the statutory committees, particularly to provide operational advice and direction to enable them to discharge their duties. Their work is monitored by the Regional Transition Committee, which I Chair.

The funding package of £47.8 million agreed by the Executive is intended to meet costs associated with various elements of the transition process, including up to £30 million to support rates convergence in the early years of the new councils.

Councils will operate in shadow form for a period of time; i.e. from the date of the elections to the new district councils in May 2014, until the date when those councils assumed full powers and responsibilities in April 2015. A newly elected council, acting in shadow form, will have the statutory authority and democratic mandate to make policy decisions that will shape the direction of the new council before it becomes fully operational.

Local Government: Election to New Councils

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment what correspondence he has had with the Northern Ireland Office regarding the proposed date for elections to the new district councils.

(AQO 4610/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has been working closely with the Northern Ireland Office in relation to arrangements for the next local government election, including the proposal to bring forward the date of the election to 2014. Moving the date of the election will allow for a transitional period in advance of the eleven new councils taking up their full range of powers and responsibilities.

I understand that an Order in Council is to be laid at Westminster in early October which will include provision for the election to take place on 22 May 2014, subject to Parliament's approval of the legislation.

Road Safety: Media Campaigns

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to launch new road safety media campaigns, in particular for rural roads.

(AQW 26175/11-15)

Mr Durkan: One of my Department's key responsibilities is to work towards further reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads each year.

My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

I believe that reducing further all deaths and serious injuries on our roads, with the ultimate ambition of 'Vision Zero', where any death is unacceptable, is an important and achievable objective.

The main causes of road casualties continue to be speeding, drink driving, inattention on our roads and failure to wear a seatbelt. Therefore, through its public information campaigns, my Department works towards encouraging all road users to be aware of their vulnerability, their responsibilities towards themselves and other road users, to influence their attitudes and behaviours when using, or thinking or using, the roads anywhere in Northern Ireland.

While most collisions occur on urban roads (roads with a speed limit of 40 mph or less) most road deaths and serious injuries happen on rural roads (roads with a speed limit of above 40 mph, excluding motorways and dual carriageways). Over the five years between 2008 and 2012, over 59% of injury collisions took place on urban roads; however, 71% of fatalities and 52% of serious injuries occurred on rural roads.

Collisions on such roads tend to be severe and randomly distributed, making specific measures difficult. However, if we are further to reduce deaths and serious injuries on Northern Ireland's roads, continuing improvements in safety on rural roads will be a vital component of this. There is therefore a significant focus in the Road Safety Strategy on rural roads, with almost every DOE road safety campaign referring heavily to rural roads, many dramatising tragic consequences characteristic of collisions on rural roads.

The Department's most recent campaign, launched on 24 April 2013, invites everyone to 'Share the Road to Zero'. This is aimed at all road user groups – cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists, drivers and passengers, and highlights rural problems, such as not knowing what is around the corner, and a key scene focuses on a horse rider. The aim is to get every road user to take personal responsibility for helping to prevent deaths anywhere on Northern Ireland's roads. The social media aspect of this campaign can be found at www.sharetheroadtozero.com

Any future campaigns will support this ambition of zero road deaths. For instance, my Department is launching a new seatbelt wearing campaign on 10th October 2013. Its key point will be the importance of wearing a seatbelt on every journey. There will be reference to both urban and rural scenes, with the main message underpinned by issues that are particularly pertinent to rural collisions.

I recognise the continuing challenges of reducing casualties on our roads, and will take forward further actions as appropriate from analysis and research.

Road Traffic Fines

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether the revenue obtained from road traffic fines is taken by Westminster.

(AQW 26217/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The functions of vehicle licensing, vehicle registration and vehicle licensing enforcement are Excepted matters and are not therefore devolved to the NI Assembly. The Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) carries out these functions in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) based in Swansea and in doing so collects penalties and fines in relation to non-payment of car tax. All related monies collected by DVA, including fines and penalties, are paid over to DVLA.

Exploris

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment what impact the proposed closure of the Exploris Aquarium, Portaferry will have on the rescue and rehabilitation of seals.

(AQW 26245/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Seals are a protected species under the Wildlife Order (NI) 1985 and the European Habitats Directive, and we have a responsibility to ensure that the population levels do not fall below favourable conservation status. We achieve this by monitoring population numbers, protecting their habitats, introducing legislation to prohibit disturbance and or damage to seals and their breeding grounds and by carrying out appropriate assessments of plans and programmes that may impact on the seals and their habitats.

I should point out that my Department has no statutory responsibility for carrying out individual seal pup rescues or for their rehabilitation which is primarily an animal welfare issue. However, on occasions when contacted directly by members of the public, departmental officials have assisted with rescues and onward transfer to Exploris.

I would however be concerned that with the proposed closure of Exploris there would no longer be a facility for rescue and rehabilitation. I regard the seal pup sanctuary as an integral part of Exploris and consequently any deliberations on the future of Exploris must take account of this facility.

You will be interested to know that I have raised the future of Exploris at the Executive Committee for discussion.

Dog Fouling: Average Fine

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what was the average (i) fixed penalty; and (ii) court fine for dog fouling offences, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26255/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department obtains statistical information on fixed penalty notices on an annual basis and this relates to financial years rather than calendar years.

In the 2010/11 and 2011/12 years the rate of fixed penalty for dog fouling offences was £50. This amount could not be varied.

During the 2012/13 year two councils (Belfast and Newtownabbey) used new powers under Clean Neighbourhoods legislation to deal with dog-fouling problems. These powers allow councils to set the rate of fixed penalty between £50 and £80. In both cases the rate was set at £80. The rate of fixed penalty for the other 24 councils in the 2012/13 year stayed at £50.

The average fine imposed by courts for dog fouling offences in each of the last three financial years is as follows:

2010/11	£50
2011/12	£72
2012/13	£45

Tyres: Disposal

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on the implementation of the Committee for the Environment's report recommendations on the disposal of waste tyres.

(AQW 26256/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Committee for the Environment's report identified 12 recommendations for implementation by the Department. These contain legislative, policy, regulatory and enforcement proposals which may require amendments of legislation or policy and will in some cases require consultation with the tyre sector. The recommendations impose short, medium and long term actions upon the Department.

Two of the recommendations relate to improving waste data for tyre arisings in Northern Ireland. NIEA is currently reviewing its data collection and collation systems for controlled wastes, including waste tyres. This will require additional resources and the development and enhancement of databases.

The Committee has also recommended that NIEA recruit additional enforcement staff. A recruitment programme is ongoing and the Agency hopes to have new staff shortly. The Environmental Crime Unit in NIEA has already recruited a number of staff and these are now in post. The aim will be to provide more robust monitoring and auditing of the waste tyre sector and enforcement of offenders.

A further recommendation requires the review and updating of waste tyre exemptions. The Agency is looking at all registered exemptions and this will include waste tyre activities.

The Committee has asked that the Department investigate the Registered Waste Carrier and Duty of Care legislation with the view to implementing an electronic system of compliance. There is presently a UK wide project in relation to an electronic Duty of Care system (eDOC) which is being tested by industry. NIEA has also recently revised its Relevant Convictions Policy. The Department intends to shortly introduce further legal requirements for Duty of Care and Waste Carriers.

The Committee considered alternative uses and new technologies as part of its Used Tyre inquiry. A recommendation in the report is the production of clear application forms and guidance for End of Waste and that these applications should be processed promptly. The Agency has set up a Policy Team to implement this recommendation.

The Committee listed several recommendations requesting the Department consider an all island producer responsibility mechanism for waste tyres. The Department is waiting for the outcome of the ROI review of its PR scheme before it progresses this recommendation. The Committee also suggested an interim compliance measure. The NIEA has been liaising with the tyre retailer association to progress this recommendation.

Mobouy Road: Retrospective Planning Application

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment why no action was taken between the time of the first retrospective planning application at Mobouy Road and Spring 2012.

(AQW 26287/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Following the discovery of the major illegal landfill site at Mobouy Road outside Derry my predecessor provided a Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on Tuesday 16 July providing background to the matter and setting out the actions he had taken to address the issues arising.

One of these was to appoint an expert external reviewer to carry out an independent review into what transpired in relation to the waste facility at the Campsie site and to identify any failures that might have occurred in the regulation of the site in respect of any sectors of central government, including what DOE did around this facility and more generally. The expert reviewer was asked to provide a report to the Environment Minister not later than Thursday 31 October 2013.

As the Question asked in this instance appears to relate to matters that will be considered by and reported on by the expert reviewer, I will wish to receive and consider his report and recommendations before commenting on any specific aspects of my Department's previous management of issues relevant to the site, including monitoring of the site and interventions by the DOE over the relevant period.

Mobouy Road: Water Quality Testing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the instances of water quality testing which have occurred at the aquifer in the vicinity of Mobouy Road.

(AQW 26288/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During the course of the criminal investigation by the Environmental Crime Unit a number of liquid samples were taken from the body of the waste. These form part of the evidence in this case and it is not possible to give further information on this as the matter remains the subject of a live investigation. Groundwater monitoring has been conducted in and around the closed landfill site by the operators as a condition of their licence.

Mobouy Road: Illegal Dump

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what regulations are in place for his Department to recover the costs of the clean-up of contaminated land from the original owner of the Mobouy Road site in the event that the land is sold to a small company.

(AQW 26289/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Provision is made for "clean-up costs" under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (the 1997 Order). Under Article 5C of the 1997 Order where a person is convicted of depositing or disposing of controlled waste a compensation order may be sought for costs incurred by the Department or others in removing waste from the land and/or taking other steps to eliminate or reduce the consequences of the deposit or disposal.

Under the Environmental Liability (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 provisions are made for cost recovery where an operator fails to comply with a statutory notice. (There are a number of different statutory notices

which may be issued in specific circumstances). In the event of an operator failing to comply with a statutory notice, the operator is liable for any reasonable costs incurred by the Department in taking reasonable action to discharge its duty.

Waste Treatment: Hightown

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has been briefed by ARC21 on the projected final cost of the Hightown Waste Incinerator project; and at what cost his Department will determine that the project is not value for money.
(AQW 26297/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is not party to any of the procurements being taken forward by the Waste Management Groups, and is not therefore party to the commercially confidential details of the arc21 project. Management of the project is a matter for arc21 and its constituent councils to determine in line with their governance arrangements.

The Department will not therefore be in a position to offer any substantive comment on either the cost or the value for money of the arc21 project until it has received a complete Appointment Business Case from arc21.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Coleraine

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to ask the British Government to withdraw their consultation on the future of jobs at the Driver and Vehicle Agency in Coleraine, based on the comments made by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport.
(AQW 26313/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The consultation documents published by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea contained an unfounded, outrageous and offensive comment that implied that staff in DVA could be guilty of being biased, on religious grounds, in the delivery of services to customers.

I have made it abundantly clear to Stephen Hammond, the relevant Minister in London, that this slur on the staff in DVA was totally unacceptable, impugning as it did the reputation of staff who have demonstrated the very highest standards of customer service.

Mr Hammond has assured me that there was no intention to imply that anyone in DVA has been, or would be, biased and, while I find it difficult to interpret the comment in any other way, I accept that its inclusion has been acknowledged by the Minister as wholly erroneous. I also note that Mr Hammond apologised to staff in DVA in response to a question in the House of Commons on 11 September 2013.

There has been a very robust, concerted response to the DVLA consultation on the future of vehicle licensing services with cross-party support to oppose the proposal to centralise services in Swansea. It is imperative that we build on the impetus that has been created by this united opposition to these ill-conceived proposals to remove local services and jobs and to seek to ensure that the matter is re-considered and the services and jobs retained in Northern Ireland.

I have spoken to staff in DVA and the end to the uncertainty and the removal of this threat to their jobs is essential. I will continue to focus my efforts on bringing this matter to a quick and satisfactory conclusion. I am meeting Stephen Hammond at the beginning of November to set out in person the very strong case for keeping vehicle licensing work with DVA.

Arc21: Procurement

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether the current arc21 procurement will provide best value for money for ratepayers.
(AQW 26327/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is not party to any of the procurements being taken forward by the Waste Management Groups, and is not therefore party to the commercially confidential details of the arc21 project. Management of the project is a matter for arc21 and its constituent councils to determine in line with their governance arrangements.

The Department will not therefore be in a position to offer any substantive comment on either the cost or the value for money of the arc21 project until it has received a complete Appointment Business Case from arc21 that has the full support of its Joint Committee.

Japanese Knotweed

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment whether there has been an increase in Japanese Knotweed in the last three years.
(AQW 26349/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) have actively encouraged the reporting of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) through the Invasive Species Ireland Project which they jointly initiated in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin in 2006. The project has worked closely with the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) in Waterford to establish the National Invasive Species Database (NISD) for the island of Ireland.

In the last three years 143 records of Japanese knotweed in Northern Ireland have been received through the database. Whilst this figure may give the perception that Japanese knotweed is expanding its range in Northern Ireland I have been advised by officials from NIEA this is not a true reflection of the situation as the majority of these records submitted will be for long established areas of growth which have been recorded as a direct result of increased awareness of Japanese knotweed.

I have been advised by officials in NIEA that whilst it is not possible to accurately quantify the abundance of Japanese knotweed it is their opinion that in the past three years there has been an overall reduction in the occurrence of Japanese knotweed in Northern Ireland. This opinion is based on the number of factors including a significant increase in the number of queries seeking advice with regards to control of Japanese knotweed, an increase in funding being provided by NIEA for catchment scale and community led control projects, an increase in training provided by NIEA to councils and local community groups; and finally an increase in the number of private companies now offering Japanese knotweed control in Northern Ireland.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: SORN Fines

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Driver and Vehicle Agency takes into account extenuating circumstances or uses its discretion to waive fines which are imposed on licence holders with respect to SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification) notices, and if so, to detail the number of fines which have been waived in each of the last four years. (AQW 26358/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Continuous Registration (CR), which was introduced in 2003, makes the registered keeper of a vehicle responsible for ensuring that, at all times, it is either licensed or has a current statutory off road notification (SORN) in place. The automatic issue of a CR penalty is prompted by the failure of a vehicle keeper to take action on the expiry of a vehicle licence or SORN notice. It is not possible to provide the number of CR penalties that relate specifically to the failure to renew a SORN declaration.

The CR penalty letter invites the recipient to notify the Agency if there are exceptional circumstances to be considered and many customers have done so. Each case is considered on its own merit and fines have been waived on the basis of the information or evidence provided, in particular where it is proven that no offence has been committed, or in extenuating circumstances.

It is not possible to provide the number of CR penalties that were closed due to the acceptance of mitigating circumstances as this information is not held.

Waste Treatment: Hightown

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of arc21/Becon's choice of site at the Hightown Quarry for its proposed Energy from Waste plant, given its proximity to the Ballyutoag Road site where a similar Energy from Waste proposal was refused. (AQW 26362/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There have been ongoing pre application discussions between the Department, arc 21 and key statutory consultees; however, no formal planning application for a Waste Treatment Facility at Hightown Quarry has been received by DOE Planning and it would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of a formal application being considered by the Department.

If an application is received, it will be advertised and assessed against relevant planning policy and legislation and all other relevant planning considerations including public the views of consultees and elected representatives.

Mobouy Road: Illegal Dump

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has made an assessment of how much it will cost to clean up the illegal dump at Mobuoy Road, and if so, to provide details. (AQW 26364/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Any assessment my officials have made of clean-up costs at this stage of their investigations into the activities around Mobuoy Road would be very much a preliminary one. A full and final cost will be dependent on a range of factors which have not yet been concluded. These include issues such as the full extent of contamination of the substrate surrounding the waste mass, the final volumes that may need removed and the most appropriate measures needed to control pollution of the environment in the interim period. It is not possible at this juncture to give an accurate estimate of the final cost of dealing with the waste in the Mobuoy area.

Mobouy Road: Water Quality Testing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail when water quality testing was completed in aquifers in the vicinity of Mobouy Road, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 26365/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A formal regional groundwater monitoring network has been in existence in Northern Ireland since 2000. None of these monitoring boreholes are currently close to the Mobouy Road site with the nearest over 4km away. In the current

financial year, NIEA will be procuring the installation of suitable boreholes at the waste site on the Mobouy Road to further support groundwater quality testing to inform a hydrogeological risk assessment for this site.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the adoption and completion of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, including the timescale.

(AQW 26630/11-15)

Mr Durkan: After extensive assessment of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission, my Department recently submitted BMAP to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) for assessment of the Plan against the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). I expect DRD's consideration to be completed by 16 October and subject to the Plan being awarded a Certificate of General Conformity, preparations for publication will commence and are expected to take 3 – 4 months. Once completed, I plan to adopt BMAP at the earliest opportunity.

Department of Finance and Personnel

SEUPB: 2013 Spending Targets

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the review of cash forecasts from Peace III projects shows in terms of projected underspend; (ii) what are Special EU Programme Body's 2013 spending targets; and (iii) whether they are likely to be achieved.

(AQW 26220/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): There is no projected underspend from PEACE III in 2013. The SEUPB 2013 cumulative spending target of €193,133,276 has been fully achieved, as of 30 September 2013.

Programme for Government: Public Procurement Contracts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the implementation of social clauses in public procurement contracts compares to the Programme for Government 2011/15 target.

(AQW 26246/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Programme for Government target for all public contracts to contain social clauses is being implemented. There are a number of standard clauses which should be included in all contracts addressing issues such as health and safety and equality. Departments are free to go beyond this where scope exists by, for example, specifying work and training placements. Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) will shortly publish further guidance on integrating social clauses into contracts once endorsed by Ministers.

Public Procurement: Joined-up Purchasing

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what targets are in place to increase joined up purchasing between public bodies.

(AQW 26248/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The target for Collaborative Procurement in the 2012 to 2015 Procurement Board Strategic Plan is to reduce the expenditure on the following categories of goods and services by £30m:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| ■ Energy | ■ ICT Commodities |
| ■ Telecoms/Networking Equipment | ■ Print |
| ■ Professional Services | ■ Advertising |
| ■ Fleet | ■ Travel |
| ■ Postal Services | |

Public Procurement: Policy

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) at what stage during the development of public procurement policy small business are represented; and (ii) by whom

(AQW 26293/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Central Procurement Directorate interacts with a wide body of stakeholders when developing public procurement policy. These include regular meetings of the business and construction industry forums both of which have representation from the small business sector through bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the Federation of Master Builders. Other Forum members will, in promoting the views of their industry sector as a whole, also represent the views of small businesses. A list of the members of each forum is attached at Annex A.

Annex A**BIFNI Members:****Central Procurement Directorate, Department of Finance and Personnel**

- NI Housing Executive
- Translink
- Southern Education & Library Board
- Sales Institute of Ireland, Northern Branch
- Institute of Directors
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Confederation of British Industry - NI
- Management Consultancies Association
- Law Society of Northern Ireland
- Strategic Investment Board
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Chartered Accountants Ireland - Ulster Society
- Momentum (TextHelp Systems Ltd)
- Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA)
- Business in the Community
- NI Council of Voluntary Action
- NI Water
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Translink
- Institute of Directors
- Chartered Management Institute & Institute of Consulting
- Social Enterprise NI
- Invest NI
- BioBusiness Ltd
- Business Services Organisation Procurement and Logistics Services (BSO PaLS) CIFNI MEMBERS:

Suppliers College

- Construction Industry Group Executive Secretary
- Contractors College
- Contractors College
- Specialist Contractors College
- Professionals Council
- Construction Industry Group of Northern Ireland
- Federation of Master Builders
- Trade Unions
- NI Housing Executive
- Central Procurement Directorate, Department of Finance and Personnel
- Roads Service
- NI Water
- Health Estates Investment Group
- Translink
- Department of Education
- Department of Employment & Learning
- Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
- Department for Social Development Social Housing
- Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure
- Strategic Investment Board
- Secretary Professionals Council
- Limavady Borough Council
- Procurement Board Member

Public Procurement: Contracts

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline in each of the last 5 years (i) the number of local firms in receipt of public procurement contracts; (ii) the value of contracts awarded to local firms; (iii) the number of Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in receipt of public procurement contracts; (iv) the value of contracts awarded to SMEs; (v) the total number of public procurement contracts; and (vi) the total value of public procurement contracts.

(AQW 26298/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: CPD extracts statistics on public procurement activity from the eSourcingNI public procurement portal supplemented by information from Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs).

The eSourcing portal was introduced on a phased basis and data in respect of all CoPEs is available only since April 2010. Data on the value of contracts awarded to local firms has not been collected but will now be obtained.

The information reported by CoPEs is provided in the following table:

	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012
The number of contracts awarded to local firms.	2028	2988
The number of contracts awarded to SMEs.	2017	3027
The value of contracts awarded to SMEs.	£533m	£598m
The total number of public procurement contracts.	2618	3802
The total value of public procurement contracts.	£1.4bn	£1.1bn

Public Procurement: Spend

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his Department's estimation of the amount of public procurement spend which remains in the local economy.

(AQW 26300/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are no figures available to estimate the amount of public procurement spend which remains in the local economy. This would require details of the supply chain relating to public contracts the reporting of which would impose a significant burden on suppliers.

Centralised Procurement

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to the creation a centralised procurement and delivery agency.

(AQW 26303/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) was set up by the Executive as part of Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. It is a centralised purchasing body under the Public Contract Regulations and provides a centralised professional procurement service to Northern Ireland departments through two Centres of Procurement Expertise - one for the procurement of supplies and services and one for construction projects.

As part of my reform agenda I intend to consider this issue.

Cycle to Work Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how many members of staff in each department have availed of the cycle to work scheme in each year since its introduction.

(AQW 26376/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Department	2012 (2)	2013 (3)	Total
DARD	51	35	86
DOE	112	62	174
DEL	34	32	66
DFP	88	59	147
DSD	119	118	237
DHSSPS	13	5	18
DRD	128	43	171
DCAL	9	9	18
DE	14	5	19
DETI	8	8	16
DOJ (1)	54	112	166
OFMDFM	6	17	23
PPS	2	13	15
Totals	638	518	1156

(1) including NI Prison Service, Youth Justice Agency and NI Courts & Tribunal Service

(2) from launch of scheme in June 2012

(3) to 19th September 2013

Railways: High Speed Rail Project

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has raised the issue of potential Barnett consequential arising from the British High Speed Rail Project with the Treasury.

(AQW 26379/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My position on the High Speed Rail project is that if this project is to be funded from additional Capital DEL allocations to the Department for Transport in England, then there should be Barnett consequentials for Northern Ireland. This has indeed been the case in the past where additional rail investment in England has resulted in Barnett allocations for Northern Ireland.

The High Speed Rail Project is not expected to commence until 2017 at the earliest, with the first phase to open in 2026. My officials are therefore monitoring the position closely and, if necessary, I will be making representation to HM Treasury Ministers as part of the next UK Spending Review to ensure that Northern Ireland receive all Barnett consequentials rightfully due to us.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Tyrone County Hospital: Consultant Geriatrician

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action has been taken by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to replace the consultant geriatrician who retired from his post in Tyrone County Hospital in August 2013.

(AQW 26172/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Western HSC Trust intends to recruit a permanent consultant as soon as possible to fill the vacant consultant post in geriatrics. The recruitment process is underway and I understand the job description for the post has been approved by the Royal College of Physicians.

Hospitals: Staffing Transparency

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to (i) introduce a system of transparency regarding the staffing levels in each ward in hospitals, similar to that in operation in the Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust and; (ii) extend such a system to fire and ambulance services.

(AQW 26174/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no plans to introduce a system of transparency regarding staffing levels similar to that in operation in the Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

Trusts should already have mechanisms in place to identify any shortfalls in staffing levels and be able to take appropriate action to ensure the delivery of safe and effective care. If additional staff are required Trusts are expected to prioritise their resources to meet that requirement.

I have an accountability mechanism in place through which these issues can be raised with commissioners and with my department. Trusts are able to highlight risks through this process.

A wide stakeholder group, facilitated by NIPEC is already developing workforce tools in specific areas, beginning with medicine and surgery and moving swiftly into community and extending to all areas over the next 3 years.

Herceptin: Clinical Trial

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the statistical findings to date of the world-wide Herceptin Clinical Trial that was introduced in 2002/03, on HER2 positive breast cancer patients attending the Belfast City Hospital.

(AQW 26198/11-15)

Mr Poots: Belfast City Hospital treated 12 patients on the original HERA study sponsored by Roche which started back in 2003. The study was a randomised three arm multi-centre comparison of Herceptin versus no Herceptin in women with HER2-positive primary breast cancer who had completed adjuvant chemotherapy. Any patient who was randomised initially to receive standard treatment on trial rather than Herceptin subsequently received Herceptin, once positive results were disclosed by Roche. Of the 12 patients recruited to the study, 5 are deceased and 7 remain on annual follow up.

There was also a follow on study called O'HERA which was an observational study exploring cardiac events in HER 2 women treated with Herceptin. A total of 37 patients who had received Herceptin consented to participate in this trial.

Rare Diseases: Drug Funding

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how drugs for patients diagnosed with a rare disease are funded.

(AQW 26205/11-15)

Mr Poots: I propose to answer AQWs 26205 and 26206/11-15 together.

All NICE-approved drugs for rare diseases are either recurrently funded or available via a cost-per-case mechanism. Where a treatment (including drugs) falls outside the range of services normally commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), clinicians can access it for their patient through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process by demonstrating clinical exceptionality. Each IFR sent to the Board must be supported by the relevant Trust manager and clinical director. In view of the funding available through the IFR process, there are no plans to establish a ring-fenced rare diseases drugs fund for Northern Ireland.

Rare Diseases: Drug Funding

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will create a ring-fenced rare diseases drugs fund, similar to the £21 million orphan drugs fund in Scotland.

(AQW 26206/11-15)

Mr Poots: I propose to answer AQWs 26205 and 26206/11-15 together.

All NICE-approved drugs for rare diseases are either recurrently funded or available via a cost-per-case mechanism. Where a treatment (including drugs) falls outside the range of services normally commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), clinicians can access it for their patient through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process by demonstrating clinical exceptionality. Each IFR sent to the Board must be supported by the relevant Trust manager and clinical director. In view of the funding available through the IFR process, there are no plans to establish a ring-fenced rare diseases drugs fund for Northern Ireland.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Appointment to Boards

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether appointment procedures for the Boards of Health and Social Care Trusts allow (i) service users; and (ii) the general public to apply to join the Board; and how many Board members in each Trust are designated as coming from these groups.

(AQW 26219/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Services Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994; and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (Northern Ireland) 1995, indicate the number of members to be appointed to each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. The Membership and Procedures regulations do not designate specific categories of member to the Boards of HSC Trusts. Therefore “service users” and “members of the general public” can apply to join the Board of the six HSC Trusts, through an open and transparent public appointment competition. As there are no designated groups of members appointed to HSC Trusts, the Department is unable to provide you with the number of Board members who come from the designated groups cited in your question.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Fire

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the recent fire at Altnagelvin Hospital has had on surgical waiting times.

(AQW 26271/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that the Trust's Business Continuity arrangements ensured that those patients whose procedures were cancelled during the week, in which the fire occurred, i.e. 23 November 2012, were rescheduled as quickly as possible, with the exception of the orthopaedic speciality, and as a result this had no material impact on waiting times in most specialities.

The orthopaedic ward was relocated to a ward with a reduced bed complement while work was underway to refurbish an alternative ward. Consequently the Commissioning Plan (CP) target for elective orthopaedics is currently not being met. The refurbished ward space became available to the service on 2 August 2013. The service increased elective beds incrementally from 5 August until reaching full bed numbers on 9 September 2013. The Trust is aiming to meet the CP target by end of March 2014 and continues to use the independent sector to reduce waiting times.

South West Acute Hospital and Altnagelvin Hospital: Agency Staff

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the use of agency staff in the (i) South West Acute Hospital; and (ii) Altnagelvin Hospital, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26304/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department monitors expenditure on agency staff by Health and Social Care Trust on a bi-annual basis and the reports are published on the Departmental internet site at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/workforce_planning/wpu-monitoring.htm

The information is presented by occupational family and by HSC Trust, rather than by individual hospital. The information below has been provided by the Western HSC Trust.

Altnagelvin Hospital

Period	Expenditure on Agency staff (including medical locums)
2010/11	£4.9m
2011/12	£4.3m
2012/13	£4.4m

South West Acute Hospital (Opened 21st June 2012)

aPeriod	Expenditure on Agency staff (including medical locums)
2010/11	nil
2011/12	£1.8m (part year)
2012/13	£2.7m

Hospitals: Advertising for Vacancies

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in each Health and Social Care Trust, (i) how vacancies for permanent and locum doctors are advertised; (ii) how many positions have been advertised over the last three years; (iii) how many interviews were held (iv) how many interviews were held on a Saturday; and (v) how many planned interviews were then withdrawn.

(AQW 26305/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i): All HSC Trusts indicated that they normally advertise for these positions in the Belfast Telegraph, the HSCrecruit website, and the British Medical Journal. In addition, the Western HSC Trust and the Northern HSC Trust indicated they used other outlets such as the Irish Medical Times for hard to fill vacancies.

(ii) to (v):

The information provided by each HSC Trust is set out in the table below:

	South Eastern	Western	Northern	Southern	Belfast
(ii) Number of positions advertised in last 3 years	292	397	226	251	331
(iii) Number of interviews held	259	211	112	151	259
(iv) Number of interviews held on a Saturday	0	0	0	0	occasionally
(v) Number of planned interviews withdrawn	1	1	8	0	0

Condition Management Programme

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the effect that worklessness has on people's health and wellbeing, to outline his intentions, of entering into a joint agreement with the Department for Employment and Learning, to secure the future funding of the Condition Management Programme from March 2014 onwards.

(AQW 26321/11-15)

Mr Poots: I propose to answer these questions together.

I am aware of the contribution that has been made by the Condition Management Programme (CMP) in supporting people with long term conditions to return to or enter the workplace. The Condition Management Programme is funded and managed by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). The Programme is delivered, on behalf of DEL, by Health and Social Care Trusts.

I met with the Minister for Employment and Learning in February 2013 to discuss his Department's proposals in respect of the future of the Condition Management Programme, including revised potential funding arrangements.

DHSSPS officials have since consulted with colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Trusts to obtain their views on DEL's proposals.

Based on these discussions, my officials are currently considering options for responding to the proposals from the Department for Employment and Learning in relation to the future of the Condition Management Programme. I expect to receive an assessment of these options in the near future.

Until then it would be inappropriate of me to comment on future funding arrangements.

Fertility: NICE Guidance

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, whether he plans to update the Assembly on his Department's progress towards implementing the 2013 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline on fertility. **(AQW 26335/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The applicability of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline on fertility to Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland is currently being considered by my Department and a decision on this will be reached as soon as possible.

I do not routinely update the Assembly on the implementation of NICE guidance; therefore I have no plan to do so with this guideline. My Departmental website indicates when guidance is endorsed as applicable in Northern Ireland and the HSC Board produces an annual report on the commissioning and implementation monitoring of NICE guidance.

IVF: NICE Guideline

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that infertile couples are able to receive three full cycles of IVF, as recommended by the 2013 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline on fertility.

(AQW 26336/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland aspires to provide three cycles of treatment as recommended by NICE, however, available resources make this unachievable. Currently we provide one publicly funded treatment to those who meet the Northern Ireland criteria and, from 1 April 2012, one frozen embryo transfer (FET) is also offered to new referrals who meet the clinical criteria.

It is recognised that some regions across the UK provide a greater number of treatment cycles than the available resources currently permit in Northern Ireland. Access criteria in Northern Ireland, which were developed following public consultations in 2006 and 2009, are however wider than in some other regions of the UK, e.g. offering treatment to couples who already have a child, thus allowing more people to avail of publicly funded treatment. To increase the number of individual treatments provided within current funding could limit the number of women who could access the service.

Dementia

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the work his Department is undertaking for those affected by dementia.

(AQW 26337/11-15)

Mr Poots: I published a Dementia Strategy for Northern Ireland in November 2011. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Public Health Agency (PHA) jointly lead the Dementia Strategy Implementation Group, which includes people with dementia and their carers, to oversee implementation of the Dementia Strategy and its recommendations.

The group has drawn up an Action Plan which is used to report progress. The action plan contains 45 initiatives which are being progressed under the themes of Reducing the Risk or Delaying the Onset of Dementia, Raising Awareness, Promoting Early Assessment and Diagnosis, Supporting People with Dementia and Supporting Carers.

The last progress report from the Group was received in June 2013. It detailed continued progress on the majority of recommendations within the action plan. The next progress report is due in December.

To date the HSCB has identified £2m recurrent funding to help with the implementation of the strategy. In addition, the PHA in partnership with Atlantic Philanthropies has secured £2m between 2014 and 2017 for research into dementia.

Children with Special Needs: Nursery Schools

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has cut funding for children with special needs in nursery schools.

(AQW 26341/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Trust that it has not applied any reduction to funding for children with special needs attending nursery schools.

The Trust has indicated its commitment, through commissioning arrangements with the HSC Board, to providing core services, such as social work, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, children's community nursing, dentistry, dietetics, orthoptics and public health nursing, to children with special needs.

Bangor Community Hospital: Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are employed by Bangor Community Hospital.

(AQW 26342/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Staff in post at Bangor Hospital at October 2013

Grade	Headcount
Acute Nurse/Specialist Nurse/Health Visitor/District Nurse/Nurse Manager	39
Acute Nurse Support	11
Admin & Clerical	10

Grade	Headcount
Facilities	10
Social worker/Allied Health Professional/Allied Health Profession Support	16
Total	86

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Bangor Community Hospital

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to extend the services currently offered by Bangor Community Hospital.

(AQW 26343/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that, following recent refurbishment, it plans to co-locate the Continence, Family Planning and the Sexual Health Services in a new area on the ground floor of Bangor Community Hospital called the Connor Suite which will improve confidentiality for service-users.

The original hospital building has also been significantly refurbished to provide additional office space for services currently located in sub-standard accommodation beside Bangor Health Centre.

The Trust has assured me that Bangor Community Hospital will continue to form an essential part of its estate for the foreseeable future.

Causeway Hospital: Maternity Services

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether maternity services that are currently provided to residents from Limavady at Altnagelvin Hospital, will be offered at the Causeway Hospital.

(AQW 26348/11-15)

Mr Poots: Any future reconfiguration of maternity services is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board as Commissioner of Services, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Strategy for Maternity Care in Northern Ireland 2012-2018, which was published in July 2012.

Currently, although Limavady lies within the boundaries of the Western Health and Social Care Trust, women from Limavady may choose to have their babies delivered in the Northern Trust's Causeway Hospital rather than in Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Loane House, South Tyrone Hospital

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been sent from Southern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals to Loane House, South Tyrone Hospital, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 26380/11-15)

Mr Poots: There were 402 admissions to Loane House, South Tyrone Hospital from other hospitals in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust during the period 1st September 2012 – 31st August 2013.

The table below shows the number of admissions to Loane House, South Tyrone from other hospitals in the Southern HSC Trust, for each of the last twelve months available.

Month	Number of admissions from a SHSCT hospital
Sep-12	28
Oct-12	41
Nov-12	42
Dec-12	34
Jan-13	32
Feb-13	38
Mar-13	40
Apr-13	32
May-13	35
Jun-13	23
Jul-13	33
Aug-13	24

Month	Number of admissions from a SHSCT hospital
Total	402

Source: Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Ulster Hospital: Proposed Catheterization Laboratory

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed catheterization laboratory facility at the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 26403/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since October 2011 the South Eastern Trust has had arrangements in place for catheterisation laboratory procedures at the Ulster Hospital through the use of a mobile laboratory unit. In January 2013, the Trust started undertaking procedures from the newly refurbished Cardiac Procedures Room in the main part of the hospital allowing for more procedures to be undertaken. This service has improved patient care and has contributed significantly to patient flow at the hospital.

The Trust has plans to introduce a primary interventional angiography service (PCI) in the future. However this is subject to the outcome of the Health and Social Care Board's review of catheterisation labs across Northern Ireland. Primary PCI, which is a 24/7 emergency stenting service, was launched recently and is delivered from the Belfast Trust for the eastern part of the region, including the South Eastern Trust area.

Prescription Drugs: Unused

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the total cost of ordered but uncollected prescription drugs for the period 01 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

(AQW 26406/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome: Ovarian Cancer

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women in the last three years, who were initially diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome, have been subsequently discovered to have ovarian cancer.

(AQW 26436/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to introduce automatic referrals for all women with Irritable Bowel Syndrome type symptoms for a CA125 blood test.

(AQW 26437/11-15)

Mr Poots: NICE guidelines state that if a patient aged 50 or over presents with symptoms that could suggest irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) in the last 12 months the GP should test for CA125. NICE Guidance for Referral of Suspect Cancer, including Ovarian Cancer, has now been rolled out across Northern Ireland. The HSCB issued guidance to all General Practitioners on 30th November 2012 advising them that the NICE Referral Criteria for Suspect Cancer is now applicable in Northern Ireland.

The PHA and the HSCB are currently working closely with GPs and specialists from across all 5 Trusts to develop an agreed management pathway for patients suspected of having ovarian cancer. The aim of the pathway is to ensure that all patients presenting with symptoms or signs of ovarian cancer are swiftly investigated and are able to access specialist cancer care rapidly. The referral pathway will reflect the evidence based approach as set out in NICE guidance and the NICE quality standards for ovarian cancer.

Work is also underway to explore the piloting of an electronic referral template by GPs for suspect ovarian cancer.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgery

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make a final decision on the future of paediatric congenital cardiac surgery.

(AQW 26446/11-15)

Mr Poots: NICS reports figures annually to the Equality Commission on all recruitment activity, including for temporary staff. These figures are available as part of the NICS Annual Report on Recruitment for 2012. This is in the public domain and is available on the NICS recruitment web-site at <https://irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net/pages/content.aspx?Page=annual-reports>

Condition Management Programme

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the implications that worklessness has on the health and well-being of the population, what plans he has to enter into a joint agreement with the Department for Employment and Learning to secure the future funding of the Condition Management Programme from March 2014.

(AQW 26450/11-15)

Mr Poots: I propose to answer these questions together.

I am aware of the contribution that has been made by the Condition Management Programme (CMP) in supporting people with long term conditions to return to or enter the workplace. The Condition Management Programme is funded and managed by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). The Programme is delivered, on behalf of DEL, by Health and Social Care Trusts.

I met with the Minister for Employment and Learning in February 2013 to discuss his Department's proposals in respect of the future of the Condition Management Programme, including revised potential funding arrangements.

DHSSPS officials have since consulted with colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Trusts to obtain their views on DEL's proposals.

Based on these discussions, my officials are currently considering options for responding to the proposals from the Department for Employment and Learning in relation to the future of the Condition Management Programme. I expect to receive an assessment of these options in the near future.

Until then it would be inappropriate of me to comment on future funding arrangements.

Maternity: Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department is implementing A Maternity Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2018.

(AQW 26469/11-15)

Mr Poots: A Strategy for Maternity Care in Northern Ireland 2012-2018, which was published in July 2012, gives women, health service commissioners and policy makers a clear pathway for maternity services in Northern Ireland from preconceptual care through to postnatal care and contains 22 objectives.

The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency are leading on the implementation of the Strategy through the Regional Maternity Commissioning Service Team, which is co-chaired by a lead officer from both organisations. A Maternity Strategy Project Manager has recently been appointed and an action plan is being drawn up to detail work already completed and to implement the outcomes and objectives of the Strategy.

Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of the proposed new build for Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon.

(AQW 26472/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Trust is currently revising its business case for submission to DHSSPS later this month.

Upon receipt, the business case will need to be assessed and approved by my Department and by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Once business case approval is received, the timing of the project will be considered as part of the prioritisation exercise within the available budget.

Hospitals: Missed Appointments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the Health Service of missed appointments in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 26480/11-15)

Mr Poots: The cost of a hospital appointment being missed is not available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Hospitals: Transport to Appointments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will extend the refund available to older people, who are in receipt of pension credit, for the use of public transport to attend hospital appointments to those who have to make use of private taxis to complete part or all of their journey.

(AQW 26482/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme, people who are in receipt of Pension Credit Guarantee Credit can be reimbursed for their travel costs to and from hospital for health service appointments and treatment. Travel costs are normally

calculated on the basis of the cheapest form of public transport available to the patient. Patients travelling by private car may claim the lesser of the estimated cost of fuel used or the equivalent public transport rate.

The Hospital Travel Costs Scheme recognises that in cases, where there is no alternative, patients may have to use a taxi or volunteer car service for the whole or part of the journey – for example where patients have restricted mobility or public transport is not available for all or part of the journey. In such exceptional cases, these costs will be reimbursed in full. There are no plans to extend this discretionary element to all patients in receipt of pension credit.

Maternity Units: Consultant-led; Midwife-led

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the location of each (i) consultant-led; and (ii) midwife-led maternity unit.

(AQW 26504/11-15)

Mr Poots: The location of each consultant-led and midwifery-led maternity unit in Northern Ireland is given in the table below.

Trust	Midwifery-Led Unit	Consultant-Led Unit
Belfast	Mater Hospital	Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital
Northern	None	Antrim Area Hospital Causeway Hospital
South Eastern	Ulster Hospital Downe Hospital Lagan Valley Hospital	Ulster Hospital
Southern	Craigavon Area Hospital	Craigavon Area Hospital Daisy Hill Hospital
Western	Altnagelvin Hospital outh West Area Hospital (SWAH)	Altnagelvin Hospital SWAH

Births: Consultant-led; Midwife-led; Homebirths

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the benefits and risks associated with (i) births at consultant-led maternity units; (ii) births at midwife-led maternity units; and (iii) homebirths.

(AQW 26505/11-15)

Mr Poots: The benefits and risks of place of birth will be individual to each woman, and should be discussed with her during her pregnancy.

Consultant led maternity units are able to provide care for women and babies who need extra care which includes the availability of epidural pain relief, delivery by caesarian section or assisted delivery using forceps or ventouse.

Midwife led units tend to use a more active birth approach incorporating aids to support labour and birth such as birthing balls and water pools, but can also provide drugs such as morphine if women request it. Women who give birth in a midwifery unit have significantly higher rates of normal birth with fewer interventions, including substantially fewer intrapartum caesarean sections, than women who planned birth in an obstetric unit. They also tend to have a higher breastfeeding rate and recount a more positive birth experience.

Home births allow families to have the comfort of familiar surroundings. Pain relief such as morphine and water birth are available but epidurals and delivery by caesarean section are not. There appears to be an increased risk of an adverse outcome for first babies born at home, but not for second or subsequent babies. Again there is a higher rate of breastfeeding and women report a positive birth experience following home birth.

Alcohol-related Admissions: Children

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been admitted to hospital in each Health and Social Care Trust area for alcohol related problems, over the last three years.

(AQW 26531/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of admissions to acute hospitals, for children aged 15 and under with an alcohol-related condition over the last three years, is detailed in the table below.

HSC Trusts	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast	14	17	19
Northern	6	12	12
South Eastern	17	10	6

HSC Trusts	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Southern	10	16	8
Western	13	7	7
Total	60	62	52

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Note:

Discharges are used as an approximation for admissions.

Alcohol-related conditions have been searched for as the primary diagnosis only.

Children have been assumed to be those aged 15 years and under.

Bowel Cancer

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are diagnosed with bowel cancer. (AQW 26591/11-15)

Mr Poots: The following table includes information regarding the number of new cases of bowel cancer (ICD-10* C18-21) diagnosed in each year between 2007 and 2011 in Northern Ireland.

Year	Number of Cases
2007	1,173
2008	1,118
2009	1,115
2010	1,199
2011	1,224

Source: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry

* For a listing and explanation of ICD-10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. For an explanation of ICD-10 codes see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ICD-10_codes.

Desertcreat Training College

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasons for the delay in agreeing the Business Case for the Police, Fire and Prison Training College at Desertcreat; and to list the preferred bidders for the project. (AQW 26850/11-15)

Mr Poots: The business case for the Northern Ireland Community Safety College was originally approved in 2011 and work began at that time. The costs for this project increased considerably since initial approval. This necessitated an addendum to the business case to be developed and approved by all parties (the Departments and the three services) as well as the Department of Finance and Personnel. Given the scale of the cost increase, it was essential that the required time was taken to review the costs to reduce as far as possible without compromising quality and to ensure that the revised business case reflects these costs. This process is nearing completion. The preferred bidder has not yet been appointed.

Redundancy/Early Retirement

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process for voluntary redundancy and early retirement for which a bid was included in the October Monitoring Round. (AQO 4757/11-15)

Mr Poots: HSC Trusts have commenced a process of liaising with staff to identify those individuals, whose roles may be affected by the transformational change envisaged by Transforming Your Care (TYC), who may wish to avail of voluntary redundancy and voluntary early retirement (VR/VER) in 2013/14. A lead-in time of around 6 months is anticipated to identify these personnel and for individual personal terms to be agreed using information available to them from HSC Pensions.

DHSSPS: Additional Funding

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to compare the level of additional funding his Department has received, since May 2011, to that set out in the 2011-15 Budget. (AQO 4756/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total additional funding received since May 2011 in relation to current expenditure amounts to £87.6m. This has been used to support the reform agenda under Transforming Your Care, to address backlogs in Elective Care waiting times and to invest in other priority front-line services, such as family/childcare, specialist drugs and unscheduled care.

A further £139.5m has also been received since May 2011 in relation to capital expenditure, which largely reflects the re-allocation of A5 monies and which has been used to support the implementation of TYC, progress a range of infrastructure projects and invest in critical medical equipment.

Care Packages

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of care packages in each Health and Social Care Trust are based on, or contain, a 15-minute element.

(AQW 26863/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in the format requested.

Children in Care

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will provide guidance and clarification to social care workers in residential care facilities on protecting children and young people from leaving premises and placing themselves in a vulnerable position.

(AQO 4752/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 4, 13 and 15 together, as they relate to the issue of protecting children and young people at risk from child sexual exploitation.

All of the Trusts and their residential homes have a clearly understood duty to safeguard the children and young people in their care under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The 1995 Order does not specify actions to be taken in the event of a child leaving the premises but guidance on this issue is provided in Volume 4 of the Regulations and Guidance to the 1995 Order.

Also, Regional guidance for social care workers and police officers was issued jointly by the Health and Social Care Board and PSNI initially in 2009 and was updated in April 2011 and again in May 2012. The guidance specifically deals with the management of children missing from residential care.

I have announced an Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation which will, amongst other issues, examine the effectiveness of measures to secure the safety and wellbeing of children in care, including those at risk of CSE.

My officials routinely engage in discussions with Department of Education Officials in relation to many issues with a joint interest. Most recently officials from both departments have had discussions about the introduction of leaflets in relation to child sexual exploitation into schools and the mechanisms for doing this.

Also, I invited Minister O'Dowd, to a Ministerial Summit on child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland, which I hosted jointly with the Minister of Justice, David Ford on 10 September 2013. Unfortunately diary pressures prevented the Minister from attending. More recently, I wrote to the Education Minister to seek his agreement to participation by the Education and Training Inspectorate in the independent expert-led Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. Members are aware that the Inquiry will be facilitated and supported by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority working jointly with the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland.

In terms of the question relating to accountability, the Inquiry into child sexual exploitation is intended to develop our understanding of the scale of the problem, which in turn will influence how we respond to it. I intend to place the emphasis of the Inquiry on the identification of what, in future, needs to be done to prevent child sexual exploitation, tackle it where it is occurring and effectively disrupt the activities of those engaging in sexually exploitative behaviours.

In the course of establishing what action needs to be taken in the future, the Inquiry will need to undertake an assessment of what is happening now to prevent, tackle and disrupt the sexual exploitation of children in Northern Ireland, consider the adequacy or otherwise of those arrangements and deliver its findings. When the Inquiry reports, every agency to which the findings relate, will need to determine what action should be taken as a result. This may require holding individuals or organisations to account. If this is the case, it will be done by way of established accountability mechanisms.

Complaints

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints have been made against the Health and Social Care Trusts and the Health and Social Care Board over the last three years.

(AQO 4758/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of complaints that have been made against the Health and Social Care Trusts and the Health and Social Care Board in the years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 is:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
HSCB	9	14	11
HSC Trusts			
Belfast	1,855	2,122	2,113
Northern	697	862	856
South Eastern	1,182	1,172	1,459
Southern	777	764	839
Western	450	467	591
NIAS	92	98	140
Total	5,062	5,499	6,009

Suicide Prevention

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what capacity building can be offered to groups providing suicide prevention and awareness services when dealing with new procurement processes.

(AQO 4759/11-15)

Mr Poots: The new procurement process is being developed by the Public Health Agency (PHA) taking into account concerns from community-based service providers over the current practice of rolling forward contracts on an annual basis. Providers have indicated that this makes longer term planning and delivery of services difficult, and that potential new service providers tend to be excluded from funding.

The Public Health Agency recognises that groups may not be familiar with the new procurement processes and has committed to informing all interested parties about how the tender process will operate. Within the confines of EU procurement law, and with regard to its obligations to act transparently and treat all bidders equally, the Agency will answer any questions it receives regarding the process.

Mental Health: Security Forces

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what level of need exists, among former members of the security services, for psychological support and mental health interventions.

(AQO 4760/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in the format requested.

But, as a general principle, ex service personnel returning to Northern Ireland have equal access to mainstream Primary Care and Mental Health services as the rest of the population. This is underpinned by a specific protocol for delivering health and social care services to members of the armed forces, their families and veterans. This was published by my Department in 2009.

My Department also established an Armed Forces Liaison Forum in 2009. This Forum provides a regular opportunity forum for Departmental officials, the HSC, representatives from the Defence Medical Services and veterans' organisations to discuss health and social care issues of mutual interest. Mental health is a standing item on the Forum's agenda.

I recently met an ex service personnel organisation which has a particular interest in mental health issues. Further work will be carried out in relation to the needs of veterans who have significant mental health conditions.

Meanwhile, the HSC Board continues to develop the range and capacity of psychological therapy services in line with the Strategy published by my Department in 2010. It recently provided an additional £1M to further develop these interventions in primary care.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he and his departmental officials have had with their counterparts in the Department of Education on child sexual exploitation.

(AQO 4761/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 4, 13 and 15 together, as they relate to the issue of protecting children and young people at risk from child sexual exploitation.

All of the Trusts and their residential homes have a clearly understood duty to safeguard the children and young people in their care under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The 1995 Order does not specify actions to be taken in the event of a child leaving the premises but guidance on this issue is provided in Volume 4 of the Regulations and Guidance to the 1995 Order.

Also, Regional guidance for social care workers and police officers was issued jointly by the Health and Social Care Board and PSNI initially in 2009 and was updated in April 2011 and again in May 2012. The guidance specifically deals with the management of children missing from residential care.

I have announced an Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation which will, amongst other issues, examine the effectiveness of measures to secure the safety and wellbeing of children in care, including those at risk of CSE.

My officials routinely engage in discussions with Department of Education Officials in relation to many issues with a joint interest. Most recently officials from both departments have had discussions about the introduction of leaflets in relation to child sexual exploitation into schools and the mechanisms for doing this.

Also, I invited Minister O'Dowd, to a Ministerial Summit on child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland, which I hosted jointly with the Minister of Justice, David Ford on 10 September 2013. Unfortunately diary pressures prevented the Minister from attending. More recently, I wrote to the Education Minister to seek his agreement to participation by the Education and Training Inspectorate in the independent expert-led Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. Members are aware that the Inquiry will be facilitated and supported by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority working jointly with the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland.

In terms of the question relating to accountability, the Inquiry into child sexual exploitation is intended to develop our understanding of the scale of the problem, which in turn will influence how we respond to it. I intend to place the emphasis of the Inquiry on the identification of what, in future, needs to be done to prevent child sexual exploitation, tackle it where it is occurring and effectively disrupt the activities of those engaging in sexually exploitative behaviours.

In the course of establishing what action needs to be taken in the future, the Inquiry will need to undertake an assessment of what is happening now to prevent, tackle and disrupt the sexual exploitation of children in Northern Ireland, consider the adequacy or otherwise of those arrangements and deliver its findings. When the Inquiry reports, every agency to which the findings relate, will need to determine what action should be taken as a result. This may require holding individuals or organisations to account. If this is the case, it will be done by way of established accountability mechanisms.

Early Intervention Fund

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update, including the timeline, on the Early Intervention Fund.

(AQO 4762/11-15)

Mr Poots: I wrote to a number of Ministerial colleagues in relation to the establishment of an Early Intervention Fund earlier this year. There is broad agreement that early intervention is vital to improving outcomes for children and families across Northern Ireland. The relevant Ministers have expressed support for the creation of a Fund, which will be delivered as part of the Delivering Social Change Programme.

I expect the proposal to be agreed by Departments in the coming weeks. We are also in discussions with philanthropy about a potential contribution to the Fund. I expect the Fund to be in place by the start of the next financial year.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how accountability mechanisms will be incorporated into the inquiry into child sexual exploitation.

(AQO 4763/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 4, 13 and 15 together, as they relate to the issue of protecting children and young people at risk from child sexual exploitation.

All of the Trusts and their residential homes have a clearly understood duty to safeguard the children and young people in their care under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The 1995 Order does not specify actions to be taken in the event of a child leaving the premises but guidance on this issue is provided in Volume 4 of the Regulations and Guidance to the 1995 Order.

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Department of Justice

Noel Parker: Temporary Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 22900/11-15, to detail (i) if this was an administrative error transcribed from a handwritten or typed document; (ii) who or what grade of staff completed the application form; (iii) who or what grade of staff transcribed it; (iv) what interviews were carried out with Mr Noel Parker in relation to his application and if he was content with this explanation as provided by Northern Ireland Prison Service, given the differentiation between the written words in question.

(AQW 24552/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): NIPS has advised that an internal investigation will be conducted into the temporary leave application and risk assessment process of Mr Parker in 2008. The Member will be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

Frank Massey: Monitoring

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether there are plans to order an investigation into the monitoring of Frank Massey whilst subject to a Sexual Offences Prevention Order, which was breached four times, in particular (i) to establish how he was able to retain a mobile phone and computer given his previous convictions; (ii) how he was able to set up a false Facebook account, enabling him to have unlawful contact with children; (iii) how these breaches were able to occur so soon after his release from a custodial sentence for the possession of indecent images of children; and (iv) which agencies were responsible for the monitoring.

(AQW 25726/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no plans to order an investigation in this case. Mr Massey was monitored in accordance with agreed multi-agency public protection procedures and the breaches of the Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) were quickly identified through effective supervision arrangements by the designated risk manager. The court subsequently revised the SOPO to incorporate additional conditions aimed at further supporting the management of assessed risk.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the statutory duty stipulated in Section 12 of the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011, for his assessment of the actions the PSNI has taken since the publication of the Barnardo's Report 'The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland'.

(AQW 26054/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have been briefed on the actions that the PSNI has taken in relation to cases of Child Sexual Exploitation since its review of public protection in 2011.

The Minister for Health, Social Service and Public Safety and I have agreed to set up an independent expert-led Inquiry to consider the issue of child sexual exploitation. I will await the outcome of that inquiry before making an assessment of the actions that all those to whom the requirements of Section 12 of the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 applies have taken, and are taking.

David Paige: Monitoring

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the Terms of Reference in relation to any investigation being carried out regarding monitoring of David Paige, particularly on the handling of his residence and how he was able to leave his approved accommodation in Belfast to reside in Craigavon, without authorities being made aware.

(AQW 26091/11-15)

Mr Ford: The agencies responsible for operating the public protection arrangements agreed, at their June Strategic Management Board (SMB) meeting, to conduct a serious case review in this case. The terms of reference for the review, which are consistent with the SMB Manual of Practice, are:

- a To look at whether the agencies involved in the management of risk posed by an individual did all that could reasonably be expected of them to manage the assessed risks; and
- b Whether there are lessons to be learned about the effectiveness of the public protection arrangements.

Child Grooming: Internet

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the work his Department is doing to increase awareness of the dangers of the grooming of children on the internet.
(AQW 26116/11-15)

Mr Ford: In August 2013 the Department of Justice launched an education resource pack aimed at 14-17 year olds to raise awareness of a range of issues relating to human trafficking. The resource pack includes some material designed to explore issues of sexual exploitation and grooming, with a view to increasing young people's awareness of the dangers and giving them the tools to make safe choices within their own lives. The pack is available to all post primary schools in Northern Ireland.

The Youth Justice Agency is currently reviewing its 'Child Protection' policy in conjunction with the new Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNi) arrangements. The new policy, together with the staff training programme which will accompany its introduction, will include awareness raising for staff on the potential dangers for exploitation of children online. A policy to safeguard young people whilst they are using Agency stand-alone computers is already in place.

From 7 October 2013, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) will be a Command within the National Crime Agency (NCA). The CEOP Command will provide a centre of excellence for the protection of children from exploitation and sexual abuse both on and offline, and for the pursuit of offenders. The NCA will be represented on the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF).

The cybercrime sub group of the OCTF is working to raise awareness and understanding of the fast evolving areas of cybercrime and cyber enabled crime across the law enforcement sector. Individuals and businesses are encouraged to report incidents and work with the authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice and avoid others falling victim.

Initiatives to raise awareness of the dangers of grooming children on the internet and other E-safety issues are also being delivered through the Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) network across Northern Ireland.

These include the Bee Safe project for primary 6 and 7 pupils, the Y-APP smart phone application for young people, the Youth Educated in Safety Project, and Internet Safety and Cyber Bullying dramas and workshops. Internet safety is also being highlighted with pupils during assembly talks delivered jointly by PCSP and PSNI; with Principals through the Schools Forum; and with parents at awareness evenings. PCSP officers are working with PSNI and the Education and Library Board to develop a booklet on the consequences of social networking.

Other measures to promote internet safety, including advice on internet scams for older and vulnerable people and information on cybercrime and internet bullying for teachers and parents, are also being delivered through PCSPs and further initiatives are planned.

I am aware that PSNI is also engaged in work to raise awareness of internet safety.

Internet Safety

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what work his Department is doing to promote internet safety.
(AQW 26117/11-15)

Mr Ford: In August 2013 the Department of Justice launched an education resource pack aimed at 14-17 year olds to raise awareness of a range of issues relating to human trafficking. The resource pack includes some material designed to explore issues of sexual exploitation and grooming, with a view to increasing young people's awareness of the dangers and giving them the tools to make safe choices within their own lives. The pack is available to all post primary schools in Northern Ireland.

The Youth Justice Agency is currently reviewing its 'Child Protection' policy in conjunction with the new Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNi) arrangements. The new policy, together with the staff training programme which will accompany its introduction, will include awareness raising for staff on the potential dangers for exploitation of children online. A policy to safeguard young people whilst they are using Agency stand-alone computers is already in place.

From 7 October 2013, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) will be a Command within the National Crime Agency (NCA). The CEOP Command will provide a centre of excellence for the protection of children from exploitation and sexual abuse both on and offline, and for the pursuit of offenders. The NCA will be represented on the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF).

The cybercrime sub group of the OCTF is working to raise awareness and understanding of the fast evolving areas of cybercrime and cyber enabled crime across the law enforcement sector. Individuals and businesses are encouraged to report incidents and work with the authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice and avoid others falling victim.

Initiatives to raise awareness of the dangers of grooming children on the internet and other E-safety issues are also being delivered through the Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) network across Northern Ireland.

These include the Bee Safe project for primary 6 and 7 pupils, the Y-APP smart phone application for young people, the Youth Educated in Safety Project, and Internet Safety and Cyber Bullying dramas and workshops. Internet safety is also being highlighted with pupils during assembly talks delivered jointly by PCSP and PSNI; with Principals through the Schools Forum; and with parents at awareness evenings. PCSP officers are working with PSNI and the Education and Library Board to develop a booklet on the consequences of social networking.

Other measures to promote internet safety, including advice on internet scams for older and vulnerable people and information on cybercrime and internet bullying for teachers and parents, are also being delivered through PCSPs and further initiatives are planned.

I am aware that PSNI is also engaged in work to raise awareness of internet safety.

Taxation Masters

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 22282/11-15, for an example of an advertisement where any such public hearing took place, or is to take place in the future.

(AQW 26148/11-15)

Mr Ford: Writs of provisional taxation assessments before the Taxing Master are posted on the notice board on the 7th Floor, Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO), Bedford House, Bedford Street, Belfast on the morning of the hearing.

EJO officials are progressing list publication on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website.

Forensic Services Northern Ireland

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases are with the NI Forensic Services, and of these, how many have overdue results.

(AQW 26177/11-15)

Mr Ford: Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) has agreed target times with its main customers for the delivery of forensic reports. At 30 September 2013, there were 1357 open cases, with 1614 associated scientific reports pending. 124 of those reports were beyond their approved target date. None of these feature on the current PPS outstanding forensic listing as provided to FSNI. It is important to note that the number of outstanding reports will vary at any one point in time. As at 30 September 2013, 97% of all casework reports from 1 April 2013 were issued within the overall target times agreed with customers.

Sexual Assault of Women: Sentences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to outline the sentences that can be imposed on those convicted of the sexual assault of a woman.

(AQW 26179/11-15)

Mr Ford: These offences, which are not gender specific, are contained in the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008. The offence of assault by penetration (section 6) carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Offences of sexual assault (section 7) carry maximum penalties of six months if tried summarily and ten years if tried on indictment. The offence of causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent (section 8) carries a range of penalties up to life depending on the type of activity involved.

Rape: Sentences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to outline the sentences that can be imposed on those convicted of the rape of a woman.

(AQW 26180/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under section 5 of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008, the offence of rape, which is not gender specific, carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Ards Division County Court: Neutral Citation

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice on what date the case listed as Neutral Citation No [2013] NICTY 3 was first published on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website.

(AQW 26188/11-15)

Mr Ford: Neutral Citation No [2013] NICTY 3 was first published on the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service website on 16 July 2013.

Prison Service: Review of Self-harm Policy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24166/11-15, whether he plans to instigate a Formal Review of Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) policy as a matter of urgency given that he has stated in his answer that the

safeguard of prisoners is “an extremely serious matter”, and the number of persons in the care of the NIPS committing acts of self-harm continues to rise: and considering the recent concerns and criticisms by the Chief Executive: the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO); the Prisoner Ombudsman, (in the Report into the Near Death of Mr C), and concerns and criticisms by other Agencies, to detail why he is delaying such a review and is only taking it forward as part of the Prison Service restructuring project and wider programme.

(AQW 26189/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is committed to completing a formal review of its Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Policy, which will be taken forward in due course in consultation with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Illegal Immigration: Magherafelt and Londonderry

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case numbers 12/101428 and 13/009820 at Magherafelt Magistrates Court and Londonderry Crown Court, whether these persons are illegal immigrants, and if so, whether they have been trafficked.

(AQW 26190/11-15)

Mr Ford: The defendants in these cases are not currently charged with immigration offences. The Police Service of Northern Ireland refer relevant cases to the UK Border Agency for investigation.

Prison Service: Review Team Report

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the comments made by Dr Tony Pearson in the Prison Review Team Report of June 2009 that the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) must operate a fair and efficient disciplinary system with zero tolerance for criminal offences, whether (i) the NIPS operates a zero tolerance system, and if not, to detail the rationale; and (ii) whether he will place a copy of NIPS policy and procedures pertaining to proper and effective handling of the alleged commission of criminal offences by all operational prison staff in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 26228/11-15)

Mr Ford: With regard to the handling of criminal offences in the Northern Ireland Prison Service the Professional Code of Conduct states the following:

- (i) Members of staff must report to their manager as soon as possible if they have been arrested, charged or convicted by a court of any criminal offence. Failure to do so may be considered to be a disciplinary matter;
- (ii) A criminal conviction, whether related to work or otherwise, may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. The main considerations which the Manager will take into account in deciding what action is appropriate are whether the offence impairs the business of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, brings the Northern Ireland Prison Service or the staff member into disrepute, or makes the individual unsuitable for their type of work; and
- (iii) Where a member of staff is convicted of an offence and receives a custodial or suspended sentence or a Community Service Order as a result of a criminal conviction, their employment will automatically be terminated.

Copies of the new Professional Code of Conduct and the new Professional Code of Ethics have been placed in the Assembly Library.

Compromise Agreements

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24971/11-15, whether he will review his answer and address points (i) and (iii) of the question which asks for a numerical reply, i.e., number of agreements and the total cost of such agreements, given that such information in no way violates any Section of the Data Protection Act 1998 and would help to fulfil the Executives pledge to provide “open and transparent government for the citizens of Northern Ireland”.

(AQW 26229/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am unable to provide any further information to that provided in my response to AQW/24971/11-15 as both the employer and employees entered into binding confidentiality agreements not to disclose the terms of those agreements, including the costs associated with the settlements.

Prisons: Reform

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the prison reforms that have been successfully implemented.

(AQW 26261/11-15)

Mr Ford: To date, nine recommendations have been approved as complete by the Prison Review Oversight Group, which I Chair. The Group provides oversight and scrutiny of the reform programme and includes a robust and challenging independent element.

The nine recommendations approved are:

- PRT 4 - Maintain and publish detailed routine data;
- PRT 6 - Role of Magilligan;
- PRT 12 - Healthcare governance arrangements;

- PRT 15 - Transfer of healthcare staff to SET;
- PRT 22 - Change management team;
- PRT 23 - Ministerial group;
- PRT 32 - Director of rehabilitation;
- PRT 34 - Safer society strategy; and
- PRT 38 - Under-18s to be moved from Hydebank

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently half way through the programme of reform, which will run until April 2015. A clear pathway for delivery has been developed to ensure all recommendations are implemented, with the remaining recommendations due to be completed at various stages over the next 18 months.

DOJ: North/South and East-West Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many meetings have been held (i) at ministerial level; and (ii) at official level with counterparts in the (a) rest of the UK; and (b) Republic of Ireland, since May 2007, including under the aegis of the north/south or east/west arrangements.

(AQW 26275/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since April 2010, I have attended 2 meetings of the British Irish Council, 2 North South Ministerial Council plenary meetings and 6 meetings under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters.

In addition, I have held a total of 74 formal meetings with Ministers of the UK Government, 5 meetings with Ministers of the Scottish Government, 7 with Ministers of the Irish Government and 2 Tri-laterals with Scottish and Irish Ministers.

My Department does not collate centrally information on bi-lateral meetings which have taken place at official level.

Magilligan Prison: Female Officers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice why he was not made aware that female prison officers at Magilligan Prison manage a sex offender wing on their own at night.

(AQW 26278/11-15)

Mr Ford: The detailing of NIPS staff, male or female, in any prison establishment is an operational matter for NIPS.

NIPS officials have advised that no member of staff is present on the wing on their own at night.

If an incident occurs that requires staff to enter the wing, an unlock team comprising of two Senior Officers and another member of staff will be deployed to that area within a short period of time.

Magilligan Prison: Sex Offender Wing

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice why he was not made aware that a sex offender wing for those aged over fifty at Magilligan Prison is not locked down at night.

(AQW 26279/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner regime in place at Magilligan is an operational matter for the Senior Management at that prison.

The Older Prisoner Unit is locked securely and in line with operational procedures to ensure the secure confinement of prisoners in that area.

Maghaberry Prison: Self-harm Policy and Procedures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25425/11-15, why he will not place a copy of the local Maghaberry Prison policy and procedures pertaining to hot and cold debriefs, as referred to in Annex N of the Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Policy 2011, in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 26309/11-15)

Mr Ford: I will arrange for a copy of the hot and cold debrief procedures to be placed in the Library.

Parking Tickets: Private Car Parks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the legal standing and enforceability of parking tickets issued in private car parks.

(AQW 26334/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice has an interest in private car parks insofar as anyone carrying out wheel clamping on private land must have a licence from the Security Industry Authority (SIA). This action is regulated due to public safety concerns. The Department has no responsibility for the issuing or enforceability of parking tickets.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25629/11-15, to detail the two occasions when "the Northern Ireland Prison Service has used the services of the Central Investigation Service (CIS) in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to carry out investigations".

(AQW 26360/11-15)

Mr Ford: NIPS is unable to provide details of investigations as it is considered that this information constitutes and contains personal sensitive data relating to third parties of which you are not the data subject. To release this information would breach the first and second principles as set out in Schedule 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Specifically, it is considered that disclosure would represent unfair processing of the data by NIPS.

Office of the Police Ombudsman: Employees

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Justice how many employees of the Police Ombudsman's office are former police officers with (i) the PSNI; and (ii) other policing bodies.

(AQW 26391/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am informed by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland that the number of employees who are former police officers with the PSNI is eight and other policing bodies is 18.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25020/11-15, given that 5.3 of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline requires that discipline investigations for operational prison staff will normally be conducted by at least a Governor 5 or above and that no regulatory provision exists for the use of Northern Ireland Civil Service staff, to clarify what stipulation for future investigators will be in the new Code.

(AQW 26396/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Northern Ireland Professional Code of Conduct, which came into effect on 9 September 2013, stipulates that where there is a suspicion that one or more persons may be involved in misconduct a Functional Head or the Senior Manager should refer the case to the Professional Standards Unit (PSU) for investigation. The Head of the PSU will then appoint an investigator.

A copy of the new Code has been placed in the Assembly library.

Prison Service: Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Policy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24196/11-15 and AQW 23174/11-15, whether he will review his answer given the apparent seriousness of Mr C's condition together with the requirement of Annex N of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Policy 2011 that hot debriefs are to take place with all staff following any serious-harm injury event or a suicide.

(AQW 26398/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not wish to review the responses provided to AQW24196/11-15 and AQW23174/11-15.

Uninsured Drivers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for driving without insurance in the (i) North Down; and (ii) Ards areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26412/11-15)

Mr Ford: Uninsured driving is an offence under Article 90(4) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The information requested is not available for the last three years. The most recent three years for which the information requested is available are 2007 to 2009.

The table below lists the number of convictions in each of the Petty Session Districts in the Ards Court Division during those years.

Table 1: Number of convictions for driving without insurance in Ards Court Division by Petty Sessions Court, 2007 – 2009

	Ards Court Division			
Year	Castlereagh	North Down	Down	Newtownards
2007	20	199	208	228
2008	Closed	185	163	179
2009	Closed	168	181	190

Notes:

- 1 Castlereagh Petty Sessions Court closed in September 2007 and moved to Newtownards Court.
- 2 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.
- 3 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.

Prison Officers: Emergency Allowance

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Emergency Allowance for prison officers.
(AQW 26414/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have referred the issue of the salaries paid to recent recruits to the independent Prison Service Pay Review Body for advice. The Pay Review Body is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of this issue and will report to me by December 2013.

Should the Pay Review Body conclude that it would be appropriate to pay an allowance, my Department will seek approval from the Department of Finance and Personnel for any additional payment in line with normal NICS pay policy.

Knife Crime: Sentences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to introduce tougher sentences for knife crime.
(AQW 26460/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sentencing is a matter for the courts based on legislation that already provides stringent penalties for knife crime with a full range of sentencing options available for violent offences involving knives or offensive weapons up to and including life imprisonment. These are supported by a full suite of offences and penalties for the possession, manufacturing or sale of knives which in themselves can attract prison terms of up to 12 months in magistrates' courts or up to 4 years in the Crown Court. I have no plans to change this package of sentences at this stage though I continue to keep the legislative framework under review.

Illicit Drugs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail what his Department is doing to combat the growing drugs trade, with particular reference to the increase in bad batches of drugs.
(AQW 26461/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, has a drugs sub group devoted to combating drug trafficking. It comprises representatives from all the relevant law enforcement agencies as well as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. It provides a forum for the sharing of information and discussion of the problems faced in the fight against drugs.

The Department of Justice is also working with others in a co-ordinated manner to assist with the delivery of the outcomes defined in the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs 2011-16; the Northern Ireland Substance Misuse Strategy. This Strategy includes a number of priorities; one of which is to reduce the availability of illicit drugs, with particular attention to tackling the complex drug supply chain.

It is important to note that drugs are not classified as 'good' or 'bad' batches. It is not possible to have confidence in the composition of so called recreational drugs, or pharmaceutical drugs bought over the internet from abroad, as many are produced in an unregulated environment without appropriate checks or controls. The only way to avoid a so called "bad batch" is to avoid all such drugs.

Office of the Police Ombudsman: Cases Reopened or Extended

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many cases the Police Ombudsman has reopened, or extended the twelve month time-limit, on the grounds of a complaint being deemed grave or exceptional, or where there was a previous investigation but there is now new evidence, which was not reasonably available before and it is now considered that the complaint is grave or exceptional.
(AQW 26468/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am informed by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland that their systems do not categorise information in a way which would allow them to automatically calculate the number of such cases.

However, a review of their caseload has revealed that the Police Ombudsman is currently dealing with over 230 cases arising from public complaints which have been deemed to be grave or exceptional. The great majority of these are matters arising from "the Troubles" between 1968 and 1998.

Court Defendants: Proceedings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the protocol, guidance or best practice policy that exists to ensure that court defendants, whether on the charge sheet, under PPS summons, on remand or convicted, are afforded respect and dignity whatever the circumstances of the alleged crime, previous record or conviction, whilst attending court proceedings; (ii) if this is adopted by all agencies under his departmental remit; and (iii) the accountability that exists for relevant agencies.

(AQW 26486/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department's Corporate Plan for 2012 - 2015 sets out the corporate values that apply to all Department of Justice staff. These include upholding the principles of fairness and justice for all, a commitment to equality and diversity, being open and transparent and acting with professionalism and integrity.

Individual Agencies have a range of service standards that support these

commitments. For example the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has developed specific standards for court staff that include the requirement to treat everyone in court with respect and consider their individual concerns or needs. Similarly the Northern Ireland Prison Service through the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service is responsible for ensuring that all defendants are treated with respect and dignity by applying Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons standards.

Compliance with service standards is the responsibility of each Agency with local managers responsible for monitoring adherence. Performance in these areas may also be subject to independent inspection or review by bodies such as Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. Agencies also have well developed customer complaints procedures to ensure any issues can be addressed.

Sexual Offences: Sentences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to introduce tougher sentences for those convicted for sexual offence.

(AQW 26487/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 introduced a new legislative framework of sexual offences with a range of maximum penalties up to life imprisonment for the most serious offending behaviour. I have no plans at present to review the sentences available.

Courts: Anonymity Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people in the adult court system have been granted anonymity orders where there is no nexus to any alleged victim, broken down by court division and nature of the alleged offences.

(AQW 26557/11-15)

Mr Ford: The following table includes details of adult defendants in live cases, with no connection to any alleged victim, who have been granted an anonymity or reporting restriction order.

The defendants are charged with a range of offences which include fraud, theft, immigration, manslaughter, distribution/possession of indecent images of child, making/possessing indecent images and drugs related offences.

Division	Number of Defendants
Belfast	16
Antrim	2
Fermanagh & Tyrone	1
Londonderry	10

Note: Information is provided from the NICTS Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS) and is current at 2 October 2013.

Prison Service: Museum Collection

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25383/11-15, in relation to the Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum Collection, to detail (i) who he has met with; and (ii) when.

(AQW 26585/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not met with any interested party to specifically discuss the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Museum collection.

My officials in NIPS have engaged with a number of bodies including the Public Records Office (PRONI) and Prison Service Trust to identify how best to preserve and promote the artefacts.

Defendants: Forensic Testing

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25622/11-15, whether he will consider this in cases where suspected drugs have been seized, given it could contribute to the reduction of prosecution costs and speed up such cases moving through the court system.

(AQW 26593/11-15)

Mr Ford: One of my priorities is to speed up the criminal justice system by tackling delay. A project team is already examining ways to improve the use of evidence in criminal cases, including improving forensic submission.

While I understand the intention of this proposal, and I am keen to take all possible measures to reduce delay, my assessment remains that it is unlikely to be consistent with our legal obligations in respect of the rights of the defendant as it could serve to diminish the presumption of innocence.

Hydebank Wood: Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the Criminal Justice Inspection's Report on Hydebank Wood Health Prison Summary, specifically HP10 and the corresponding sections within the reports on Suicide & Self Harm in both the Women's Prison and Young Offenders Centre that criticises the implementation and handling of Supporting Prisoners at Risk procedures, whether they are fit for purpose; and review the manner in which Supporting Prisoners at Risk procedures operate.

(AQW 26597/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the joint inspection in February 2013, steps have been taken to address shortcomings in the implementation of the Supporting Prisoners At Risk procedures at Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre, including improved multi-disciplinary care planning.

A safer custody continuous improvement plan is in place supported by an enhanced auditing and assurance programme, including robust management checks.

Whilst accepting the criticisms, it should also be noted that the Inspectorate also noted that self-harm levels were low in Ash House and care planning improved and that the use of observation rooms and anti-ligature clothing in the Young Offenders Centre had reduced, with levels of self-harm again, not high.

Firearms: Licences

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to clarify the legal position on the granting of firearms licences to people with epilepsy.

(AQW 26611/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 consideration of an individual's fitness to be granted to firearm certificate is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Chief Constable may seek medical reports to inform his decision making.

National Crime Agency

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the effect the failure to implement the National Crime Agency on tackling (i) fuel smuggling; (ii) human trafficking; (iii) sectarian violence; and (iv) drugs offences.

(AQW 26625/11-15)

Mr Ford: The absence of agreement on the National Crime Agency's role in Northern Ireland in the devolved arena means that the NCA will have a restricted role in Northern Ireland. I believe that we need a fully functioning NCA in Northern Ireland, which takes account of policing structures here. I am still seeking to secure the wider application with appropriate recognition of our unique policing architecture.

The impact will vary for the crimes highlighted, and the agencies here and I will seek to ensure the best outcome, recognising the legal and practical constraints.

Fuel smuggling and excise evasion are reserved matters, so the NCA's powers will extend to these.

PSNI human trafficking investigations will continue to be able to avail of the international reach and wider intelligence picture of the NCA, but the PSNI will not be able to draw on the direct operational support of the NCA in Northern Ireland, except where there are immigration offences. Civil recovery of assets related to trafficking will be restricted to cases where there are immigration offences.

'Sectarian violence' is not generally regarded as organised crime and it is, therefore, a matter for PSNI.

The NCA's operational role in respect of drugs offences will be restricted, for example, to the international importation of drugs where customs powers can be used.

The NCA's civil recovery powers in Northern Ireland do not provide the ability to pursue assets in other jurisdictions.

National Crime Agency

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what effect the commencement of the National Crime Agency on 7 October 2013 will have on the ability of the PSNI to hold and confiscate proceeds of crime.

(AQW 26647/11-15)

Mr Ford: The creation of the National Crime Agency (NCA) has no impact on PSNI asset recovery powers. As of 7 October 2013, the police will still be able to seize criminal assets and the agencies here can pursue criminal confiscation.

The Serious Organised Crime Agency, however, was the lead agency on civil recovery. With its abolition, there is a serious gap in Northern Ireland in terms of the ability to use civil recovery powers to remove assets gained from offences in the devolved arena, such as armed robbery and human trafficking. That is because, in the absence of legislative consent by the Assembly, the NCA's work on civil recovery cases in Northern Ireland is limited to assets gained from crimes in the reserved and excepted fields. Following a Supreme Court judgment, the NCA is also restricted to recovering assets located within Northern Ireland. The legislative consent of the Assembly is required to make the jurisdictional repair under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 which has been made to enable all other United Kingdom jurisdictions to target assets wherever they may be. These issues leave Northern Ireland more vulnerable to money launderers than Great Britain and Ireland.

I firmly believe that the NCA should be empowered to take on all civil recovery cases in Northern Ireland under additional local accountability safeguards and I will continue to work to achieve that.

Lisnevin: Sale of Site

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the revenue his Department expects to generate from the sale of the Lisnevin site in Millisle.

(AQW 26681/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current plan for closure and vacating Millisle is predicated on the opening of the Northern Ireland Community Safety College. However, NIPS will shortly develop a business case that explores options for the early closure of the Prison Service College on the Millisle site.

If, subsequently a decision is taken to sell the site the potential value will not be known until the land is put up for sale on the open market.

National Crime Agency

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the cost to the local economy of the failure to fully implement the National Crime Agency on 7 October 2013.

(AQW 26697/11-15)

Mr Ford: While there is likely to be some impact on the local economy, at this very early stage it is not possible to quantify the cost to the local economy of having the National Crime Agency (NCA) operating in Northern Ireland with limited powers. Naturally, I will be monitoring the impact of the restrictions on the NCA's role here.

Drug-related Offences: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for drugs related offences in North Down, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26706/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available at levels below the Court Division in question (in this case, Ards Court Division). The most recent year for which information is available is 2009. Therefore, figures in relation to convictions for drugs related offences in the Ards Court Division for 2007, 2008 and 2009 have been provided.

Number of convictions for drugs offences in Ards Court Division, 2007 – 2009

Year	Convictions
2007	81
2008	99
2009	73

Notes:

- 1 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.

Convictions: Availability of Information

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 26218/11-15, to detail (i) why there is a time lag of over 3 years in relation to the availability of information on convictions; (ii) whether this is the case for all conviction statistics; and (iii) what steps are being taken to rectify the delay.

(AQW 26777/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information on convictions in all Courts in Northern Ireland is published by the Analytical Services Group (ASG) in my Department. Up until 2007, data on convictions were sourced from a Police Service of Northern Ireland system. Developments in data recording from 2007 onwards meant that this was no longer possible and the ASG encountered major technical difficulties in translating files from legacy systems, to produce sentencing information. This applied across all convictions data.

An alternative source for convictions data was identified for subsequent years. Data for 2007 and 2008 were made available to ASG for validation in 2011. Finalised convictions data for 2007 and 2008 were published in September 2012 and, for 2009, in September 2013.

Work to provide data from 2010 onwards is currently ongoing, with an aim that data for 2010 and 2011 will be available by spring 2014, data for 2012 by early summer 2014 and data for 2013 by end 2014. Once this is done, it is planned that conviction and prosecution data will be processed, fully validated and made available within six months after each year end.

Judges: Security

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether (i) members of the judiciary, at all levels, continue to receive close protection security whilst travelling to and from court; and (ii) a review of this security is planned, in particular for District Judges and Deputy District Judges.

(AQW 26783/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not appropriate to comment on judicial security arrangements.

Department for Regional Development

Mobouy Road: Illegal Landfill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has vested, or intends to vest, any of the land comprising the illegal landfill site at Mobouy Road, Derry; and whether as a result, his Department has inherited, or risks inheriting, any public liability for the decontamination of this land.

(AQW 25176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Only when my officials have completed their consideration of the issues raised during the public inquiry, will I be in a position to decide whether the road should proceed.

Belfast Public Bike Hire Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline (i) the safety issues that his Department has identified for cyclists using the route from Central Station to the Belfast City Centre; and (ii) how these will be addressed prior to the introduction of the Belfast Public Bike Hire Scheme.

(AQW 25260/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is aware of issues for cyclists using the route from Central Station to Belfast City Centre.

I would also advise the Member that I have recently instructed my officials to give increased and focused priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. To that end, I am establishing a new cycling unit to ensure cycling issues and initiatives are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner across my Department, in partnership with local government, voluntary bodies, public transport operators and the health and education sectors.

Parking Restrictions: Joy Street, Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the on-street parking restrictions in Joy Street, Belfast.

(AQW 25515/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A map detailing all the parking restrictions in Joy Street, Belfast is available in the Assembly Library.

In summary, most of the junctions and some short lengths of road within Joy Street have been marked with double yellow line restrictions which prohibit parking at all times. The cul-de-sac portion off Ormeau Avenue is largely subjected to a single yellow line restriction prohibiting parking from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Saturday inclusive. There are also short sections of street that have no parking restrictions.

Cycling: Wales Travel Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there has been a study completed on Wales' travel legislation to ascertain what lessons can be learned for Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to cycling.

(AQW 25589/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Active Travel (Wales) Bill places a requirement on local authorities to continuously improve facilities and routes for walkers and cyclists and to prepare maps identifying current and potential future routes for their use. The Bill will also require new road schemes to consider the needs of pedestrians and cyclists at design stage.

My Department has developed an active travel strategy, which was published in Jan 2013 and can be found at <http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications>. This strategy replicates the spirit of the Welsh Bill and demonstrates my commitment to provide safer roads for the vulnerable and build on the sustainable transport agenda.

Over the period 2003–2013, my Department has invested over £9 million on cycling infrastructure measures with a view to making traffic conditions more suitable for cyclists. This has included the provision of approximately 220 kilometres of cycle lanes. These cycle facilities are also included in the Department's maintenance regime and subject to regular inspections and remedial work, when appropriate.

The Department's budget for cycling measures for the current financial year is approximately £420,000, which is comparable to the level of spend in recent years.

The 2014/15 budget for cycling has yet to be finalised. However, it is anticipated the overall Capital budget will be similar to this financial year, in the region of £9 million, and the allocation to cycling will also reflect the same level of investment at approximately 5%.

My Department's Transport Policy Division has a budget which it uses to grant aid Local Authority Active Travel Demonstration projects, some of which have a cycling element.

In addition, I have instructed my officials to give increased and focused priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

Narrow Water/Carlingford Lough: Proposed Bridge

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what involvement his Department has had on the proposed new bridge for Carlingford Lough.

(AQW 25606/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A project to construct a bridge at Narrow Water in Warrenpoint is being taken forward by Louth County Council in partnership with Newry and Mourne District Council. My Department has no direct involvement in the delivery of this scheme, however, legislation is required to deal with the impact of this bridge proposal on the Newry River, which is a public navigable waterway, as far as it relates to Northern Ireland. Consequently, my Department has a role in processing the necessary Bridge Orders.

Ballymena to Dunsilly Dual Carriageway

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development why the resurfacing works on the Ballymena to Dunsilly dual carriageway were scheduled to begin on 2 September 2013, when traffic was likely to be at its heaviest.

(AQW 25708/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This scheme was one of five significant resurfacing schemes on the strategic road network, undertaken by my Department's Roads Service Northern Division. The commencement of these schemes was delayed due to the embargo on road works on all A class routes, imposed at the time of the G8 Summit.

Whilst four of the schemes were delivered within the July and August holiday period, there was insufficient time and capacity available to also complete the A26 Lisnevenagh Road within the same period.

Details of the average daily traffic flow on the A26 Lisnevenagh Road from April 2011 – September 2011 (inclusive), which is the most up to date figures currently available, are provided in the table below:

Month	Average Vehicles
April	31,128
May	30,973
June	30,794
July	29,880
August	32,849
September	29,822
Average	30,758

The A26 Lisnevenagh Road does not experience its heaviest traffic flows during September. Over the summer period, this road carries, on average, 30,750 vehicles per day, with the busiest month being August when flows are some 7% above average, whereas during both July and September flows are 3% less than average.

Cycle Lanes

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total kilometres of cycle lanes in each district council area. (AQW 25803/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

Council Area	Cycle Lane (km)
Antrim Borough Council	14
Ards Borough Council	5.6
Armagh City & District Council	2.4
Ballymena Borough Council	10
Ballymoney Borough Council	2.6
Banbridge District Council	1.15
Belfast City Council	81.4
Carrickfergus Borough Council	3.35
Castlereagh Borough Council	35.67
Coleraine Borough Council	12.4
Cookstown District Council	3.1
Craigavon Borough Council	41.14
Derry City	16.9
Down District Council	7.5
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	2
Fermanagh District Council	4.6
Larne Borough Council	1.6
Limavady Borough Council	10
Lisburn City Council	31.4
Magherafelt District Council	2
Moyle District Council	1.2
Newry & Mourne District Council	35.3
Newtownabbey Borough Council	19.13
North Down Borough Council	20.76
Omagh District Council	11.4
Strabane District Council	2.4
Total	379.00

Details of the total kilometre-length of cycle lanes, in each District Council area, are shown in the table below:

Cycle Lanes: Segregation

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has considered piloting the use of segregated cycle lanes using planters and armadillos, such as those that are being introduced in London. (AQW 25875/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

The new cycling unit, when established, will look at all options and in particular, the use planters and armadillos, such as those being introduced in London.

Translink: Bus Routes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many bus routes have been suspended by Translink, in the last three years.

(AQW 25930/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Bus routes which have been withdrawn taking account of patronage and costs in the last 3 years is as follows:

Year withdrawn	Ulsterbus Services
2009	4A – Bloomfield Shopping Centre to Craigantlet
2009	5C – Newtownards to Belfast via Craigantlet
2011	296 – Omagh to Longford
2013	356 – Ballyclare Town Service
2013	359F – Larne Town Centre - Asda
	Metro
2011	29B City Centre – Hollywood Exchange via Forestside and Braniel
2011	64A City Centre – Fairview Road via Downview and Abbeycentre
2012	76 Newtownbreda Tesco – Carryduff
2013-10-03	82A Poleglass - City Centre via Glen Road

Translink has endeavoured to achieve efficiency savings with minimum impact on geographic network coverage and service provision. The majority of efficiencies in recent years have been achieved through a comprehensive range of timetable departure and frequency adjustments rather than service route withdrawals or suspensions. In cases where poor customer demand has made it necessary to withdraw a service, alternative service options have been adjusted and promoted, where possible, to minimise customer inconvenience.

Greenways

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department plans to adopt derelict railway line routes to create cycling and pedestrian green ways.

(AQW 25966/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The scope for potential walking and cycling routes along abandoned railway lines and the mechanisms to develop them are matters which can be considered by the cross-departmental Active Travel Forum which is chaired by my officials and meets regularly to monitor the Active Travel Strategy. Most abandoned lines have been sold off into private ownership. Some have been transferred to other public bodies. The creation of cycling and pedestrian paths, therefore, would require negotiation of public rights of way.

My Department has co-operated previously with other partners to deliver walking and cycling routes along the former Belfast to Comber railway line and on the development of the Waterside Greenway Project, providing combined pedestrian and cycle facilities in Londonderry.

I would also advise the Member that I have recently instructed my officials to give increased and focused priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. To that end, I am establishing a new cycling unit to ensure cycling issues and initiatives are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner across my Department, in partnership with local government, voluntary bodies, public transport operators and the health and education sectors.

Advisory Cycle Lanes

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development pursuant to AQW 25216/11-15, to detail the advisory cycle lanes that he is considering designating as mandatory cycle lanes.

(AQW 25968/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I will ask the new Cycling Unit to review the point regarding advisory cycle lanes.

Advisory Cycle Lanes: Parking

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to introduce a penalty for drivers who park in advisory cycle lanes, particularly during peak times.

(AQW 25969/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Advisory cycle lanes can be marked on the road without the need for accompanying legislation, and consequently a Penalty Charge Notice cannot be issued to a vehicle found parked in one.

Whenever possible, my Department does try to introduce advisory lanes where there are other parking restrictions in place such as clearway regulations, which, if contravened, would attract a Penalty Charge Notice. As you will appreciate, however, this is not always possible.

Craigagh View Estate, Cushendun: Unadopted Roads

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will take enforcement action under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, to have the roads adopted in the Craigagh View estate, Cushendun.

(AQW 25978/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Craigagh View is an unfinished housing development in Knocknacarry. It has planning approval for 24 houses, of which 8 are complete. My Department has no immediate plans to take enforcement action, however, officials keep the situation under review and consider the available options.

Cycling/Pedestrian Bridges

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many new cycling/pedestrian bridges are currently under consideration by his Department; and to detail the status of each one.

(AQW 26030/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of new cycling and/or pedestrian bridges currently under consideration by my Department, their current status and a brief description of each, are set out in the table below:

Bridge Location	Current Status and Description
Lagan Bridge, Belfast	At feasibility stage. Proposal for a cycle/pedestrian bridge over the River Lagan.
Strabane (Melvin)	Planning application submitted and economic appraisal currently with DSD for approval. This proposed pedestrian and cycle bridge is part-funded under my Department's Active Travel Programme.
Strabane Town Centre	At preliminary design stage. Pedestrian and cycle bridge for which funding is dependent upon obtaining a funding partner.
Majors Bridge - A34 Maguiresbridge Road, Lisnaskea	At feasibility study stage. Proposal to widen or replace existing road bridge or provide additional structure to facilitate pedestrians and cyclists.
Milltown Bridge - U5053 Craigadick Road, Maghera	At feasibility study stage. Proposal to widen or replace existing road bridge and facilitate pedestrians and cyclists.
B47 Sixtowns Road, Straw, Draperstown	At feasibility study stage. Proposal to widen or replace existing road bridge or provide additional structure to facilitate pedestrians and cyclists.
Hunters Crescent/Strathroy, Omagh	Pedestrian and cycle bridge has been provided by Omagh District Council and will be adopted by Roads Service.
Drumragh Car Park/Back Market Place, Omagh	At design stage. Proposal for pedestrian and cycle bridge to be delivered by Omagh District Council and adopted by Roads Service.

Car Parking: Free Provision in Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to review the free parking provision in Ballymoney.

(AQW 26032/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: You will be aware I announced a freeze on any further increase to car parking charges in early November 2012 for the remainder of the current budget period; that is, up until 2015. This announcement also provides for a freeze on the introduction of charges in existing Roads Service operated car parks during this period.

My Department operates 10 off-street car parks in Ballymoney, two of which are subject to charges. Church Street has 96 spaces with a tariff of 40p per hour and Castle Street has 117 spaces with a tariff of 20p per hour. The other eight car parks are free and collectively offer some 505 spaces which equates to 84% of all off-street spaces. I can confirm I have no plans to introduce charging at the eight free car parks.

There are also significant numbers of short-stay on-street parking spaces available within Ballymoney Town centre.

Park and Ride: A26 from Ballymoney to Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department is giving to the introduction of park and ride facilities on the A26 from Ballymoney to Ballymena.

(AQW 26034/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Based on the number of cars parking at various points along the road, there is evidence of the need for a Park and Share/Ride car park along the Glarryford to Drones Road corridor.

I am pleased to confirm the proposed A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road dualling scheme will include the provision of a 50-100 space Park and Ride/Share facility that will be located adjacent to the Drumadoon Road junction.

Although funding for construction of the dualling scheme is not currently provided for in the current budget period, I will continue to press for funding.

Ballycarry Railway Station: Footpaths

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on road and footpath improvements in the vicinity of Ballycarry Railway Station.

(AQW 26075/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A number of options have been considered for the provision of a footway over the bridge adjacent to Ballycarry Railway Station. The site is particularly constrained and it is difficult to find a solution that is deliverable, both in terms of practicality and value for money.

One of the options being considered was a footbridge, however, preliminary estimates indicated it would be very expensive to construct. Another option is to introduce traffic signals to control traffic to a single lane, freeing up space for footway provision on the bridge itself. This is more economically viable and has potential for further development, although it may interrupt the flow of traffic on the bridge and lead to some delays at peak periods.

My Department's officials have had preliminary discussions with their counterparts from Larne Borough Council regarding a number of issues relating to the development of the Gobbins Coastal Path project. These discussions have included consideration of pedestrian movements from Ballycarry Halt to the centre that will be constructed on the Middle Road. My officials will continue discussions with both Translink and Larne Borough Council to further consider the options available for infrastructure improvements, in the vicinity of Ballycarry Halt.

Bicycle Stands

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of bicycle stands that will be installed in each council area in the next three years.

(AQW 26103/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has plans to provide a number of cycle stands in the greater Belfast area as well as in some other Council areas in Northern Ireland. However, the exact number of stands and their location still has to be determined.

As the detailed budget for subsequent years has not been finalised, it is not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed 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.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils.

In addition, the implementation of public realm and other development works by others, such as DSD, may include the provision of cycle hoops / stands.

Car Parking: Resident Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the provision of residents' car parking schemes outside of Belfast.

(AQW 26107/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials from my Department are currently developing Residents' Parking Schemes for parts of the Lower Malone and Stranmillis areas of Belfast as well as discrete areas in Londonderry and Antrim. Along with scheme development, my Department is currently drafting the necessary subordinate legislation to facilitate schemes and aims to have the first schemes delivered during 2014.

Gransha Road Roundabout, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the action being taken to ease traffic and pedestrian problems at the Gransha Road roundabout, Bangor.

(AQW 26108/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has commissioned consultants to examine possible options to improve pedestrian facilities at the roundabout. Officials expect this study to be completed within the next six months, when they will be in a better position to establish the best way forward.

I have asked Mr Bertie Ellison, Divisional Roads Manager, Roads Service Eastern Division, to advise you of the outcome.

Transport: Integration

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what strategy is being pursued to integrate transport facilities, including cycling.

(AQW 26111/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I published the New Approach to Regional Transportation in March last year, which has at its core a strong focus on the integration of transport facilities. Through this document, I set out my commitment to an integrated, modern, reliable and environmentally efficient transportation network that meets the needs of communities and business. I believe the people of Northern Ireland deserve nothing less.

In publishing the Active Travel Strategy this year, I set out my ambition to put walking and cycling at the heart of our local transport arrangements, to encourage a healthier, less stressful and lower cost alternative to the car for many shorter daily journeys.

This was followed by my Department's publication of an Action Plan for Active Travel which covers the period up to 2015. The plan sets out initiatives and strategies that will be taken forward by government departments, local authorities and voluntary bodies to encourage more cycling and walking and less dependency on private cars.

The integration of cycling with public transport facilities and private car usage is an ambition which I am determined to realise. In line with this, officials in my Department have been taking forward work to develop a Transport Delivery Plan for the next Budget Period of 2015-19, which will include projects to encourage integrated transport facilities as well as help to achieve the strategic objectives of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Alongside this, I have established a new Cycling Unit within my Department, which will explore a number of issues including the integration of new and existing transport facilities with cycle-friendly measures.

Advisory Cycle Lanes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the legal standing and enforceability of Advisory Cycle Lanes.

(AQW 26112/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Advisory cycle lanes are bounded by a broken white line and can be marked on the road without the need for accompanying legislation, and consequently a Penalty Charge Notice cannot be issued to a vehicle found parked in one.

Whenever possible, my Department does try to introduce advisory lanes where there are other parking restrictions in place such as clearway regulations, which, if contravened, would attract a Penalty Charge Notice. As you will appreciate, however, this is not always possible.

In addition, Rule 104 of the Highway Codes states "Do not drive or park in a cycle lane marked by a broken white line unless it is unavoidable" and, while failure to comply with this rule will not, in itself, lead to a prosecution, The Highway Code may be used in evidence in any court proceedings under the Traffic Legislation to establish liability.

Responsibility for moving traffic offences rests with PSNI, who would be best placed to comment on whether driving in an advisory cycle lane constitutes an offence.

Motorists: Awareness Campaign

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered introducing awareness measures for motorists similar to Transport for London's 'look out for cyclists when getting out' campaign.

(AQW 26113/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that the Department of the Environment has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes, which I am highly supportive of. My Department works closely with the Department of the Environment on matters of road safety, including in the Delivery Board for the Road Safety Strategy and on a number of joint activities such as the development of the Cycling Skills and Cycling Safety leaflet.

With regard to awareness measures, the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign, which launched in October 2011 and is still ongoing, comprises radio and rear of bus advertisements reminding drivers and cyclists alike to pay attention when sharing the road.

In May 2012, a campaign was launched to encourage road users to 'respect everyone's journey'. The important safety messages to drivers will benefit all vulnerable road user groups, including cyclists.

In September 2012, a campaign was launched, focusing on wider road user responsibility, urging all road users to take responsibility for their actions on the road. The television, press and online campaign includes an injured cyclist saying "I was cycling in the bike lane. The driver said the sun was in his eyes".

A further campaign, launched on 24 April 2013, invites everyone to 'Share the Road to Zero'. It is aimed at all road user groups – cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists, drivers and passengers and, indeed, focuses heavily on cyclists in the opening scenes. The aim is to get every road user to take personal responsibility for helping to prevent deaths on Northern Ireland's roads.

I understand that given a rise in cyclist casualties, the Department of the Environment is currently analysing available data and has commissioned qualitative research to help inform consideration of potential new educational activity around cyclist safety.

As the Member will be aware, I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

Car Parking: Resident Permits

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the provision of Residents' Parking Permits. (AQW 26115/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials from my Department are currently developing Residents' Parking Schemes for parts of the Lower Malone and Stranmillis areas of Belfast as well as discrete areas in Londonderry and Antrim. Along with scheme development, my Department is currently drafting the necessary subordinate legislation to facilitate schemes, and aims to have the first schemes delivered sometime in 2014.

Roads Service: Waste Tarmac Disposal

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development how Roads Service disposes of waste Tarmac. (AQW 26149/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has arrangements with its current bituminous material suppliers for the supply of material and the collection of waste for recycling. Where the bituminous waste is significantly contaminated with topsoil and clay, it may be landfilled.

All waste is accompanied by a Controlled Waste Transfer Note, in accordance with the current Duty of Care Regulations.

Cycle Lanes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location and extent of the cycle lane provision in North Down. (AQW 26168/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of locations and the extent of my Department's cycle lane provision in North Down are provided in the table below:

	Location	Extent	Length (Km)
1	A2 Tillysburn to Holywood	Tillysburn Roundabout to Sullivan Place	4.7
2	Abbey Street, Bangor	Bus Station to Dufferin Avenue	0.5
3	Ballycrochan Road, Bangor	Donaghadee Road To Hawe Road	2.8
4	Bexley Road, Bangor	Ashbury Avenue to Gransha Road	1.0
5	Newtownards Road, Bangor	Abbey Street to Abbey Hill Drive	0.9
6	Silverbirch Road, Bangor	Ballycrochan Road to Ashbury Avenue	1.9
7	Crawfordsburn Road Bangor	Springhill Road to Station Road Carnalea	1.7
		Total Length (Km)	13.5

Cycle Lanes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of the cycle lane provision in North Down has been provided within the last five years.

(AQW 26169/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has completed seven cycle lane schemes, delivering 13.5 km of cycle lane in North Down, two of which were completed within the last five years, representing almost 20% of the total length provided:

- Newtownards Road, Bangor (0.9 Km); and
- Crawfordsburn Road, Bangor (1.7 Km).

Cycle Lanes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans for the provision of new cycle lanes in North Down, and if so, to detail the location.

(AQW 26176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes, including the provision of new cycle lanes, 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.drdsni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformatiotype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

The detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised therefore it is not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

I can advise the Member there are cycle facilities along the A2 between Tillysburn Roundabout and the start of the slip road which leads to Hollywood Exchange, although there are breaks in current provision for both pedestrians and cyclists along the full route to Hollywood Exchange. I have asked my officials to investigate the feasibility of providing a complete link for pedestrians and cyclists along this stretch.

Road Salt

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has a sufficient quantity of road salt to deal with any severe weather problems this winter.

(AQW 26178/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: All of my Department's salt barns are at full capacity with stocks in excess of 70,000 tonnes with additional salt stock resilience of 38,100 tonnes held at six strategic locations.

The current Winter Service salt contract also provides for the supply of a further 15,000 tonnes per month from October 2013 to April 2014, if required.

A8

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the A8.

(AQW 26186/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to advise that construction of the 14km of dual carriageway on the A8, between Coleman's Corner Roundabout and Ballyrickard Road, is now 13 months into a 34 month programme and is currently on schedule to open to traffic by Spring 2015.

Public Transport: Bicycles

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the new cycling unit in his Department will consider the use of bicycles on public transport.

(AQW 26230/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The use of bicycles on public transport is one of a number of cycling related issues that officials within my Department's new cycling unit will be giving consideration to, in conjunction with their counterparts in Translink.

Road Salt

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total tonnage of road salt that will be available from 1 November 2013.

(AQW 26233/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is well prepared for the incoming winter season. All salt barns are at full capacity with stocks in excess of 70,000 tonnes with additional salt stock resilience of 38,100 tonnes held at six strategic locations.

The current Winter Service salt contract also provides for the supply of a further 15,000 tonnes per month from October 2013 to April 2014, if required.

Car Parking: Resident Schemes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Residents' Parking Schemes are under consideration in the urban areas of Coleraine.

(AQW 26235/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm there is currently one residents' parking scheme under consideration within the urban areas of Coleraine, at Adelaide Avenue.

My officials have carried out some preliminary surveys of resident and non-resident parking demand, and further surveys are planned. These surveys will establish whether a Residents' Parking Zone can be established and also allow for preparatory work to be carried out in relation to the legislative requirements.

Legislation is currently being prepared for a scheme in Antrim and another in Londonderry, and it is envisaged these will be implemented and monitored for a short period of time to ensure the legislation is robust before other schemes are taken forward.

Street Lighting: Residential Areas

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25528/11-15, to detail (i) the policy on updating street lighting in residential areas; and (ii) the date the decision was taken to remove street lighting on paths at the rear of residential properties.

(AQW 26236/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's policy on updating street lighting in residential areas is that, when an old street lighting scheme has reached the end of its life, a new lighting system will be designed and installed in line with current standards and policies. Current policy states "those roads, footways and footpaths which only give rear access to properties, or are alternative routes to already lighted roads or footpath, will generally not be lit".

As stated in my response to AQW 25528/11-15, the policy in respect of lighting paths at the rear of residential properties has been in place since at least 1994.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what powers of discretion traffic wardens have when issuing a Penalty Charge Notice.

(AQW 26262/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Traffic Attendants carry out their duties in accordance with my Department's Parking Enforcement Protocol, which can be accessed from the NI Direct internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8462

To ensure provision of a fair and consistent enforcement service, Traffic Attendants are not able to show any further discretion.

A5: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of the A5 road scheme not progressing to his Department.

(AQW 26280/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and the Executive remain committed to the A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) project, which although delayed due to the court ruling, is still being progressed.

A5: Landowners

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much compensation will be paid to land owners due to the A5 road scheme not progressing.

(AQW 26281/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and the Executive remain committed to the A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) project which, although delayed due to the court ruling, is still being progressed.

With regard to compensation, less than half of the 113 landowners affected by preliminary works have currently submitted claims associated with reinstatement works they have carried out, or for the use and occupation of the formerly vested lands. It is therefore not possible at this time to predict how much compensation will be paid to landowners.

It is estimated the costs of reinstating the lands will be in the region of £1.5m. Some landowners have chosen to complete this work themselves, whilst others have opted to have the work carried out by the contractor.

The amount of compensation paid to landowners, as at 30 September 2013, amounted to £586,680.45.

Mobouy Road: Illegal Landfill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department had vested, or plans to vest, any of the lands identified as comprising the illegal landfill site at Mobouy Road, Derry; and whether as a result, it has inherited, or has identified itself as being at risk of inheriting, any public liability for the decontamination of any of this land.

(AQW 26285/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 25176/11-15.

Bus Lanes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how many bus lanes operate in Belfast, and the Greater Belfast area, from Monday to Friday, and of these, how many also operate on a Saturday.

(AQW 26292/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Bus lanes within the Greater Belfast area, which operate on 14 corridors and in the city centre, measure approximately 51 km in length.

The following bus lanes generally operate from Monday to Friday at peak times only, morning and evening:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Albertbridge Road; | ■ M1/Westlink - Roden Street; |
| ■ Andersonstown Road/Falls Road; | ■ Saintfield Road/Ormeau Road; |
| ■ Antrim Road; | ■ Shankill Road; |
| ■ Castlereagh Road; | ■ Shore Road; |
| ■ Crumlin Road; | ■ Stranmillis Road; |
| ■ Hollywood Road; | ■ Upper Newtownards Road; and |
| ■ Lisburn Road; | ■ Woodstock Road. |

Of the bus lanes listed, approximately 2.6km operate from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday to Saturdays within the city centre, which represents 5% of the total length of bus lanes in the greater Belfast area.

Housing Developments: Adopted Roads

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of housing developments in the (i) Omagh District Council; and (ii) Strabane District Council areas which require roads to be adopted by his Department.

(AQW 26299/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Within the Omagh District Council area, there are 52 unadopted private streets.

Within Strabane District Council area, there are 51 unadopted private streets.

Roads Service: Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25313/11-15, for an update on the progress of the outcome of the meeting with Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council.

(AQW 26310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I advised the Member in my reply to his Assembly Question, AQW 25313/11-15, Roads Service has requested a meeting with the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council's town centre manager and Coalisland area councillors to discuss parking issues in Coalisland. It is anticipated that a meeting will be held before the end of this month.

Cycling: Strategies

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the strategies being pursued to increase the number of people using cycling as a means of transport.

(AQW 26330/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Active Travel Strategy which I launched in January aims to put walking and cycling at the heart of our local transport arrangements, encouraging a healthier, less stressful and, increasingly, lower cost alternative to the car for many shorter daily journeys.

This was followed by my Department's publication of an Action Plan for Active Travel which covers the period up to 2015. The plan which is published, along with the Active Travel Strategy, on my Department's internet site sets out initiatives and strategies that will be taken forward by government departments, local authorities and voluntary bodies to encourage more cycling and walking and less dependency on private cars.

Also I am establishing a new cycling unit to ensure cycling issues and initiatives are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner across my Department, in partnership with local government, voluntary bodies, public transport operators and the health and education sectors.

Port of Belfast: Sale

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the meetings or discussions that he or his senior officials have had regarding the sale of the Port of Belfast.

(AQW 26393/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am unaware of a proposal to sell Belfast Port and neither my senior officials nor I have had discussions regarding such a proposal. While I am willing to explore all options for the future that will improve the commercial operation of the port, maintain its competitiveness and enhance its contribution to the growth of the Northern Ireland economy, I envisage that the assets would remain in public ownership.

Port of Belfast: Sale

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether H M Treasury have made any approaches in relation to the sale of the Port of Belfast.

(AQW 26394/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Her Majesty's Treasury has made no such approaches to me or to my Department. Furthermore, the Minister of Finance and Personnel has informed me that DFP officials have not, in this administration, had any approaches from HM Treasury in relation to the sale of the Port of Belfast.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the progress made on obtaining the £40m revenue from the Belfast Harbour Authorities, as set out in the Programme for Government 2011-15.

(AQW 26395/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to my previous answers on 14 February 2013 (AQW 19202/11-15) and 21 June 2013 (AQW 24050/11-15).

Railways: Work at Night

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's policy on work being carried out on railway lines at night.

(AQW 26456/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This is an operational matter for Translink. Most of Translink's maintenance and engineering work on railway lines and structures takes place at nights and week-ends. This helps ensure that Translink can keep the trains running with minimum disruption to passenger services. Furthermore Translink has to ensure that maintenance staff and contractors can work safely without the risk of moving trains; which also requires them to carry out most work at night.

Railways: Belfast to Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times work has been carried out on the Belfast to Bangor railway line at night, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26457/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised me that work was carried out, at night, on the Belfast to Bangor railway line 158 times in 2011, 153 times in 2012 and 108 times in 2013.

Railways: Work at Night

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the consultation process that takes places prior to work being carried out on railway lines at night.

(AQW 26458/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: For significant engineering projects working for an extended duration in one location NI Railways aim to send letters to local people and advise local authorities.

For routine maintenance and emergency repairs which are more transient in nature it would not be usual to contact local residents.

Railway lines are operational almost every day of the year and accordingly most maintenance work to ensure the network remains safe takes place at night.

The noise generated by engineering projects will be considered at the planning stage and efforts made to reduce it however the maintenance or replacement of railway infrastructure often requires some heavy engineering processes to be undertaken.

Dial a Lift

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the promotion of the services provided by Dial a Lift; and whether he plans to take steps to ensure that older people living in rural areas are made aware of the service.

(AQW 26488/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The main aim of my Department's 'Dial a Lift' scheme, supported by the Rural Transport Fund (RTF) is to provide a transport option for rural individual members to access local services. Transport is provided by Rural Community Transport Partnerships and each Partnership provides services based on a specific geographical area in line with the aims of the RTF to facilitate transport in rural areas. The support available from my departmental budget to support these services is approximately £3m per year.

Promotion of the Dial-a-Lift scheme is undertaken at a local level by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships, taking account of the resources available to them. The Partnerships' promotional activity would include a mix of local road-shows, linking into other local events, presentations to groups, leaflet / flyer distribution and local press articles.

The Partnerships also link into the MARA Project (Maximising Access in Rural Areas) a DARD initiative designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation. The project operates on the basis that those most vulnerable in rural areas, in the majority of cases elderly people, are identified for a MARA visit by a trained enabler. A holistic assessment is carried out of the person's needs including transport, this information is then referred to the Partnerships who contact the person and discuss transport options, including Dial-A-Lift for them. This approach is focused on identified needs.

Dial a Lift

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will extend the Dial a Lift service in rural areas to people who are required to attend an inpatient appointment at hospital.

(AQW 26489/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The main aim of my Department's 'Dial a Lift' scheme, supported by the Rural Transport Fund (RTF) is to provide a transport option for rural individual members to access local services. Transport is provided by Rural Community Transport Partnerships and each Partnership provides services based on a specific geographical area in line with the aims of the RTF to facilitate transport in rural areas. The support available from my departmental budget to support these services is approximately £3m per year.

Under the 'Dial a Lift' scheme the Partnerships have always been able to provide transport to local GP surgeries, dentists and local clinics. My Department agreed with the Partnerships in 2010 that they may provide transport to local hospitals for members who do not qualify for Department of Health Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS) assistance with travel. This position remains unchanged.

The Dial a Lift scheme should not be seen as a substitute for health funded transport, which is the statutory responsibility of the DHSSPS under the auspices of the Patient Care Service. The Patient Care Service (a tier of the NI Ambulance Service) provides non-emergency patient transport services across Northern Ireland.

I recognise the need for my Department to interact with DHSSPS on these important issues. A process has started and my Department is currently leading on a pilot project in the Dungannon area to consider the opportunities for a more joined up approach to the delivery of publicly funded transport services

Buses: Bicycle Storage

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will include specifications for bicycle storage when procuring for buses.

(AQW 26510/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is aware of the need to provide space for bicycles on its vehicles. I have asked it to explore these options going forward taking account of value for money, safety and impact on its overall passenger base. Translink plans will be subject to economic appraisal and this is one of a number of factors which will be considered.

Buses: Bicycle Storage

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what correspondence there has been between Translink and bus providers regarding cycling storage facilities on buses.

(AQW 26511/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have not had any direct contact with manufacturers regarding cycle racks since the trial mentioned in AQWs 26029/11-15 and 26367/11-15. However, it maintains a watching brief on all such developments within the industry. If a device/methodology emerges which appears to be suitable for operation in the NI environment, Translink have been asked to give it due consideration.

The Department sets broad targets for Translink in terms of bus fleet age and accessibility and must assess Translink proposals in terms of value for money. Cycling storage facilities on buses can be considered as one of a range of issues going forward.

Transport: Bicycle and Rail

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the planned investment for encouraging mixed bicycle and rail transport use.

(AQW 26521/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have recently announced the creation of a unit which will be tasked with developing cycling and walking initiatives and making a case for investment. In terms of making use of public transport Translink have confirmed that currently there are 208 bicycle storage spaces across the rail network. NI Railways continue to regularly monitor levels of use of these facilities and will develop a programme for installation of additional spaces where further demand is projected.

The class 3000 trains which entered service in 2004-05 have capacity to accommodate up to 4 bicycles. The class 4000 trains which entered into service in 2011-12 have capacity to accommodate 8 bicycles in a 3 car train. In addition folding bicycles can be accommodated provided they are completely folded.

In relation to buses, making provision for those combining bike and bus travel will be considered by the new unit referred to above.

Dee Street/Mersey Street Junction, Comber

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to upgrade the road surface at the Dee Street/Mersey Street junction, particularly for cyclists travelling over the Dee Street bridge, in order to link with the Comber Greenway.

(AQW 26527/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department undertakes an annual programme of reconstruction and resurfacing works through which schemes are implemented on a prioritised basis. Dee Street is included in the current three year structural maintenance programme and resurfacing work should proceed within this period, subject to the availability of the necessary funding.

Railways: Western Arc

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would make a joint application with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to have the Western Arc, a proposed rail connection between Belfast, Derry, Galway and Cork, included as a Pre-Identified Project on the Connecting Europe Facility list.

(AQW 26544/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am always prepared to cooperate with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport on issues and projects of mutual interest.

Despite intensive lobbying by my Department, the European Commission has ruled that Londonderry does not meet the criteria required for inclusion as a Core Node. As a result, Londonderry and its connection to Belfast are not included on the TEN-T Core Network.

The list of pre-identified projects in the Connecting Europe Facility has been restricted to the Core Network. Given that, and taking into account the Commission's ruling, a proposed rail connection project between Belfast, Londonderry, Galway and Cork could not be included on the list. However, in the disbursement of the Connecting Europe Facility funds, 5% of the total budget is due to be reserved for the Comprehensive Network. Consequently, other projects related to Londonderry's transport links may still be eligible to bid for EU funding in the future.

Railways: Coleraine to Londonderry

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the timeframe to complete the delayed signalling upgrade on the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line.

(AQW 26546/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: You will be aware of my disappointment that Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Londonderry has been delayed. This resulted from difficulties that arose during the procurement process.

Translink has commenced a new procurement strategy and currently estimates that Phase 2 will be completed by the end of 2016. However, my officials will work closely with Translink in order to identify any and all opportunities to bring this date forward.

Reservoirs: Church Road, Hollywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the plans for the reservoirs located on Church Road, Hollywood.

(AQW 26575/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the reservoirs at Church Road, Hollywood are no longer in service and will be declared surplus to requirements. In disposing of surplus assets, NIW must ensure that it obtains the best price, achieves value for money and maintains high standards of propriety. NIW has not yet identified a timeframe for offering them to the market.

Railways: Infrastructure in West and North- West Ireland

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) whether he is aware of the West On Track submission to the EU Petitions Committee, which raised concerns over the Irish Government's commitment to rail infrastructure projects in the West and North West of Ireland; and (ii) the actions he can take to influence greater distribution of the European Regional Development Fund on public transport by the Irish Government in the North West.

(AQW 26589/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that I am aware of the recent submission made by the group West on Track. The exploration and securing of European funding opportunities remain an ongoing priority for my Department and we remain committed to working with government partners in the Republic of Ireland in our efforts to seek and secure further funding for cross border projects in the next programme period.

Rapid Transit

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the timeframe for the commencement of work for the Belfast Rapid Transit project.

(AQW 26617/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently developing the detailed designs for the new Belfast Rapid Transit system. As the detailed designs for individual sections of the routes are completed it is our intention to undertake local information events at a number of locations along the routes. This will provide an opportunity for local residents and traders to view the proposals and speak to officials.

Work is due to commence on the routes and the provision of Park & Ride facilities in 2014.

The specification of the Belfast Rapid Transit vehicles and the design of the Belfast Rapid Transit halts are due to be completed in 2014.

Between 2015 and 2017 we will complete the infrastructure works, procure the vehicles, finalise the operations plan and formally award the operating contract.

Belfast Rapid Transit is scheduled to become operational in 2017, subject to the completion of the required statutory processes and the availability of finance.

Buses: Cyclist Usage

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 26028/11-15, how he plans to ensure that the number of cyclists using buses and related demand levels are measured.

(AQW 26641/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink does not issue tickets for bicycles carried on buses and thus there is no mechanism for counting the number carried. Translink has no plans to change its ticketing technology to take account of bicycles carried. However, Translink conductors and ticket collectors monitor the number of cyclists who have tried to use buses or trains with bicycles. In the future the Cycling Unit may be in a position to survey this issue.

Water Meters: Installation

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development of the water meters installed in South Antrim, how many carried a charge for installation, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26667/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that customers are not charged for water meter installations and consequently there have been no customers charged for meter installation in South Antrim during any of the past 5 years. Water meter installation charges are not applied because the meters are owned by and remain the responsibility of NIW.

Portavoe Reservoir: Sale

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the revenue his Department expects to generate from the sale of the Portavoe Reservoir

(AQW 26680/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that when disposing of surplus assets, it must ensure that it obtains the best price, achieves value for money and maintains high standards of propriety. Any sale is dependent on a number of factors, not least the market conditions at the time of the sale and the level of expressions of interest.

All of NIW's assets have an estimated value known as the Net Book Value (NBV) which is used for accounting purposes. The NBV must be equalled or exceeded in order for the disposal of an asset to proceed. Since the final accepted sale price for Portavoe Reservoir will be entirely dependent on the level of interest shown if and when the reservoir is offered to the market, NIW cannot at this stage speculate on the level of revenue likely to accrue.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Overpayment

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how, and when, the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was involved in the decision that the four planned maintenance contractors, identified in the alleged overpayment of £18m, would not receive any new contracts until matters relating to planned maintenance have been resolved; and what is the timescale for such resolution.

(AQW 26087/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive has advised that the issues around the award of the new planned maintenance framework were discussed by the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive at its meetings on 29 May, 26 June, 31 July, 28 August and 25 September 2013.

In terms of the planned maintenance framework, it is anticipated that the Housing Executive Board will consider this matter at their October meeting. In relation to the double glazing framework, the injunction that had prevented the appointment of contractors has been lifted and appointments to the framework should be completed by the end of October.

Derelict Houses: Ballysally

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development when the first batch of derelict houses in Ballysally, which are about to be renovated, will be available for occupation.

(AQW 26110/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Plans are to start work on the refurbishment of the first ten houses in December. It is expected that work will be complete by March 2014, after which all can be occupied.

Jobseeker's Allowance: Claimant Penalties

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the penalties for people who were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, accepted a permanent job and subsequently resigned from their permanent job with the intention of re-claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.

(AQW 26202/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department currently has an effective regime which enables it to apply the appropriate sanctions to those jobseekers who contribute to their own unemployment.

When a person claims Jobseeker's Allowance, they must be available for and actively seek work. Where a person accepts a job and subsequently chooses to leave that job and reclaims Jobseeker's Allowance, they will be asked for the reason why they left. Their employer may be asked to comment on any statement they make. A person needs to show that they had "just cause" for leaving their job.

After considering the available evidence, if a decision maker decides that the person left their job without just cause then a sanction will apply for a period between 1 and 26 weeks.

The purpose of the sanction is to protect social security funding from claims arising from circumstances that a person has brought upon themselves.

Hardship payments may be considered in certain circumstances.

Social Housing: Audit Office Report on Fraudulent Occupation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, following the publication of the Audit Office Report which concluded that some 2,400 properties in the social housing sector could be occupied fraudulently, how he plans to tackle this issue.

(AQW 26207/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In order to address this situation as noted in the NIAO report, the Housing Executive recently developed a Tenancy Misuse/Fraud Strategy (TFS) which sets out measures to allow staff to effectively prevent, detect and tackle tenancy misuse and fraud. The TFS is being rolled out and is expected to be fully in place by the end of the financial year. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations is also in the process of developing a model Tenancy Fraud Strategy for Housing Associations to adopt and use as appropriate.

Recommendation 2 of the Audit Office Report specifically details the need for a dedicated Tenancy Fraud Strategy within the Housing Executive, which draws upon best practice examples. The Housing Executive's Tenancy Fraud Strategy (TFS) provides a framework for the Housing Executive to identify and address social housing tenancy misuse and/or fraud within its stock and the strategy will be further developed to take account of relevant recommendations published in the recent NIAO report. A working group incorporating the Department, NIHE and Housing Associations is being set up to examine what actions can be taken to more effectively address the issues identified.

Housing Executive: Tenancy Fraud Strategy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, following the recent Audit Office Report on Tenancy Fraud, to outline the initial results following the investigations of the Tenancy Fraud Strategy of the Housing Executive.

(AQW 26208/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As noted in the NIAO Report, the Housing Executive has recently developed a Tenancy Fraud Strategy and is rolling this out during 2013/14. Records for the year to date show that that Abandonment and Non Occupation Notices have been served on 161 Housing Executive properties with 59 properties recovered to date.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Eviction

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department plans to accommodate people who have been evicted from their homes because of mortgage arrears.

(AQW 26238/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am aware that a large number of people here are experiencing difficulty meeting mortgage payments which can lead to the distressing prospect of court action and possible repossession and I empathise with those finding themselves in this situation.

Repossession should always be the last resort and I would urge anyone experiencing mortgage difficulties to access the services available through the Mortgage Debt Advice Service who can provide advice and assistance on housing options to help prevent eviction. This free advice service, operated by Housing Rights, has received funding from my Department until March 2015.

I recognise that this is a serious social and economic issue that requires further consideration. With that in mind, I have already asked my officials to establish a new Repossessions Taskforce that will examine ways in which to relieve the position here. Officials are currently preparing draft terms of reference for the Taskforce and I will make an announcement on the matter in the coming weeks.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive can also provide advice and assistance, and have legal duties to those who find themselves homeless. The legislative criteria with regard to homelessness are the same for all applicants, including those who have lost their homes due to mortgage arrears. If the applicant has priority need and is unintentionally homeless then secure accommodation will be made available and if the applicant is intentionally homeless accommodation will be made available for a limited period to give the applicant a reasonable opportunity to source alternative accommodation for their occupation.

Housing Executive: Convictions for Fraudulent Occupation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what penalties can be imposed on a person facing a first conviction of an offence associated with fraudulently claiming to occupy a property owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive or a Housing Association.

(AQW 26250/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At present there is no criminal offence in Northern Ireland relating to a tenant claiming to occupy a property but not in fact doing so. The Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 has been enacted in England and Wales to deal with tenancy fraud in the social rented sector, but such legislation is not in place in Northern Ireland. The current sanction in Northern Ireland would be loss of the tenancy through repossession proceedings.

A working group incorporating the Department, NIHE and Housing Associations is being set up to examine what can be done to more effectively address tenancy fraud. This will include the need for new legislation.

Housing Executive: Maintenance Contractors

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 24783/11-15, how, and when, the Board of the Housing Executive was involved in the decision that the four named planned maintenance contractors would not receive any new contracts until matters relating to planned maintenance have been resolved.

(AQW 26277/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the Member to my answer in AQW 26087/11-15.

Housing Executive: Rent Arrears

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total rent arrears owed to the Housing Executive in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency; and what action has been taken to recuperate these arrears.

(AQW 26306/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate data by Parliamentary Constituency. However, the tables attached detail the rent arrears as follows: -

- Table 1 - provides figures by Housing Executive District Office area at March 2009, March 2010, March 2011 and March 2013.
- Table 2 - provides figures for March 2012 - these are only available by Housing Executive Area Accounts Unit due to the implementation of a new computer system at that time.

In relation to actions taken to recover arrears, the Housing Executive has seven dedicated Accounts Units who apply their policies and procedures across Northern Ireland. These included early intervention, promoting specialist money advice providers and working with tenants to agree a suitable repayment agreement. In situations where arrears continue to increase, it can be necessary to take court action to obtain a decree for repossession of the property. However, repossession is only as a last resort.

Table 1 – Rent arrears by Housing Executive District Office Area

District Office	March 2009 Total (£000K)	March 2010 Total (£000K)	March 2011 Total (£000K)	March 2013 Total (£000K)
West Belfast	758	702	682	869
East Belfast	802	768	768	808
Belfast North	1503	1380	1182	1352
Shankill	711	698	661	956
South Belfast	824	784	777	933
Belfast Area	4598	4332	4070	4918
Bangor	545	574	554	614
Newtownards	602	596	561	710
Castlereagh	820	801	735	833
Lisburn Antrim St	636	594	579	666
Lisburn Dairy Farm	439	406	340	346
Downpatrick	396	352	310	335
South East Area	3438	3323	3079	3504
Banbridge	178	172	143	124
Newry	322	243	232	241
Armagh	168	157	135	125
Lurgan/Brownlow	250	236	220	268
Portadown	228	187	163	182
Dungannon	201	174	158	172
Fermanagh	174	173	167	184
South Area	1521	1342	1218	1296
Ballymena	245	287	280	376
Antrim	249	267	314	451
Newtownabbey 1	307	318	320	333
Newtownabbey 2	280	335	345	410
Carrickfergus	257	311	304	377
Larne	198	203	190	220
Ballycastle	66	75	76	126
Ballymoney	102	119	118	144
Coleraine	393	384	405	477

District Office	March 2009 Total (£000K)	March 2010 Total (£000K)	March 2011 Total (£000K)	March 2013 Total (£000K)
North East Area	2097	2299	2352	2914
Waterloo Place	196	169	178	215
Waterside	614	555	521	499
Collon Terrace	385	362	371	380
Limavady	256	238	220	226
Magherafelt	192	166	160	187
Strabane	317	272	283	281
Omagh	176	140	111	110
Cookstown	132	112	92	91
West Area	2268	2014	1936	1989
Annual Total	13922	13310	12655	14621

Table 2 – Rent Arrears by Housing Executive Area Accounts Unit

Accounts Office	March 2012 Total (£000)
Belfast Area	4588
South East Area	3343
South Area	974
North East Area	2646
West Area	2437

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive: Housing Council Rent Arrears

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development how many elected members of the Housing Council are in rent arrears to the Housing Executive.

(AQW 26307/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that no elected members of the Housing Council are in rent arrears to the Housing Executive.

Private Landlords: Upgrade of Heating Systems

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) funding schemes; (ii) programmes; and (iii) grants are available to private landlords to upgrade heating systems.

(AQW 26333/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not have a specific funding scheme, programme or grant for private landlords to upgrade heating systems in their properties. However, the Department does have schemes which assist low income households, including privately rented, to upgrade their heating systems.

The Warm Homes Scheme upgrades heating systems in privately owned and privately rented homes where the existing heating system is coal fire, Economy 7 or bottled gas. The tenant must receive a qualifying benefit.

In exceptional circumstances work to heating systems may be included as part of a Discretionary Renovation Grant, which can be paid, by the Housing Executive, to a private landlord. Exceptional circumstances are deemed to exist where there is an imminent and significant risk to the occupier. The amount of grant paid depends on the approved cost of the work and their financial circumstances. If they are on a low income they may get grant aid up to a maximum of £25,000. The NIHE will calculate if they have to make a contribution. A landlord's grant is determined on a percentage basis depending on the area in which the property is located.

Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development when he will be in receipt of the Draft Annual Report for 2012/13 of the Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal Areas that relate to health, skills and training development.

(AQW 26347/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My officials are currently in the process of analysing the 2012/13 annual reports for all 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. They will all be presented to me within the next two weeks, following this they will be published on my Department's website.

Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the current status of the Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan.

(AQW 26384/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Ballymena Town Centre masterplan was published in April 2009 and includes 46 actions to be delivered over a 15 to 20 year timescale. The masterplan proposals are being delivered through public private partnerships established by the Council, such as Ballymena Town Centre Development Ltd and Ballymena Voluntary Strategic Investment Board.

Work is currently ongoing on a major £4 million public realm scheme for the town centre, a £150,000 was revitalisation was completed earlier this year and my Department is working with a range of stakeholders in relation to the potential development of the OFMDFM owned St Patrick's Barracks site and the development of a site in Bridge Street.

Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development which elements of the Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan are currently being implemented; and to detail the investment being provided by his Department.

(AQW 26385/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A number of the actions identified in the Ballymena Town Centre masterplan have already been completed by my Department or by Ballymena Borough Council. Work is currently ongoing on a major public realm scheme for the town centre, a revitalisation scheme was completed earlier this year and my Department is working with a range of stakeholders in relation to the potential development of the OFMDFM owned St Patrick's Barracks site and the development of a site in Bridge Street. The investment by my Department to date in the regeneration of Ballymena Town Centre, including funding currently approved for the public realm scheme is £3.06million.

Housing Executive: Cookstown and Magherafelt Schemes

Mr I McCreá asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive schemes are planned for the (i) Cookstown; and (ii) Magherafelt District Areas, in this financial year, broken down by housing estate.

(AQW 26404/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The tables below give details of the Housing Executive's planned schemes for the Cookstown and Magherafelt District areas in this financial year. It should be noted that many of these schemes include single dwellings (or very small numbers of dwellings) in rural areas across the council areas. Therefore, the main locations for each scheme are included rather than every location being listed.

Table 1 – Cookstown District area

Scheme	Dwgs	Date *	Estates
Riverside Drive/Windsor Crescent, Cookstown Heating	49	DOP 22/04/13	As per scheme name
Moneymore/ Stewartstown Heating	22	DOP 22/04/13	As per scheme name
Cookstown Smoke Alarm Replacement	70	DOP 02/06/13	Various addresses in Cookstown North & South; Moneymore; Stewartstown
Cookstown 15 Year Boiler Replacement	52	DOP 16/09/13	Cookstown North & South; Moneymore; Sandholes; Stewartstown; Coagh/Lisnahall
Killymoon Crescent, Cookstown Roofs	12	ESD 26/10/13	As per scheme name
Princess Avenue/ Windsor Crescent Kitchens	68	ESD 22/01/14	As per scheme name, plus addresses in Lissan Road and Cooke Crescent

Table 2 – Magherafelt District area

Scheme	Dwgs	Date *	Estates
Glenburn/Sandy Grove Heating	49	DOP 03/06/13	As per scheme name in Magherafelt, plus addresses in Bellaghy and Glenelly Heights, Draperstown
Magherafelt Smoke Alarm Replacement	41	DOP 13/05/13	Various addresses in Ballymaguigan, Maghera, Magherafelt, Moneyneena and Tobermore
Magherafelt Low Rise Fire Doors	38	ESD 10/03/14	Hall Crescent & Meeting House Avenue in Maghera, Glenburn Park in Magherafelt
Leckagh Drive/ Walk, Magherafelt: External Cyclical Maintenance	127	ESD 10/03/14	As per scheme name
Maghera/Bellaghy Kitchens	71	ESD 24/03/14	Springfield Park & William Court in Bellaghy; Glenelly Villas in Draperstown; Crawfordsburn, Mullagh Park and Tamney Crescent in Maghera
Magherafelt Heating	100	ESD 31/03/14	Various addresses in Bellaghy, Castledawson, Maghera & Magherafelt
Riverside, Castledawson/ Killowen Drive External Cyclical Maintenance	206	ESD 31/03/14	As per scheme name
Magherafelt Double Glazing	77	ESD 31/03/14	Various addresses in Curran, Fallahogey, Gulladuff, Moneyneena, plus Alexander Park in Upperlands

DOP = scheme has started

ESD = current programmed start date (these are indicative dates and are subject to the scheme design/approval and contractors being in place.)

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Councils: Closure of Facilities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any evidence of a growing trend in councils of closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis; and if any funded activities are under pressure from closure or additional funding requirements.

(AQW 26448/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have no evidence of any trend across councils to close visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis. Nor do I have evidence that any related funded activities are under pressure from closure or are requiring additional funding.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been placed in the work-related activity group since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26478/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Between October 2008 when Employment and Support Allowance was introduced, and August 2013, there were 23,094 people placed in the work related activity group.

The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been placed in the Support Group category since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26479/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Between October 2008 when Employment and Support Allowance was introduced, and August 2013, there were 30,287 people placed in the Support Group category.

The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency.

Village, South Belfast

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what assurances he can give that the agreed allocation process for homes in the redeveloped area of the Village, South Belfast, will strictly adhere to (i) (Category 1) Allocations will first go to those residents still living in the redevelopment area; (ii) (Category 2) Former residents who facilitated redevelopment by moving out of their homes, and have letters from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive guaranteeing them the right to return to the area; and (iii) (Category 3) The general housing list; those in this category would be allocated after those in categories 1 and 2 have been offered first.

(AQW 26542/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I can confirm that properties are being allocated in the priority as stated, with the proviso that some discretion has to be brought into play in terms of matching the phased handovers coming on stream, in terms of size and suitability, against the requirements of the next priority applicant. For example, in the case of a three bedroom property becoming available, where there are no persons in the first two categories requiring a three bedroom property, then offers would be made to the general waiting list in the usual way. Also, some applicants in the first two categories have deferred their priority status and indicated a preference to wait until forthcoming phased handovers become available in order to avail of a preferred location.

The broad thrust is to give priority to people from the first two categories and only move to applicants from the general waiting list where houses have either been refused or deferred for whatever reason by applicants in the first two categories or where houses do not match requirements. All those with a guarantee letter are guaranteed a return to a new build property in the Village.

Private Landlords: Unsuitable Tenants

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is any process in place whereby private landlords are held accountable when they rent property to unsuitable tenants; and if not, whether he plans to legislate to make irresponsible private landlords answerable when their tenants cause disruption to others by anti-social behaviour or criminal activity.

(AQW 26543/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Articles 26 & 27 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 set out the steps a landlord can take to deal with anti-social behaviour by, or affecting, their tenants.

It is not normally possible to make one person responsible for the actions of another and I have no plans to bring forward legislation which would hold a landlord responsible for the actions of their tenants.

Strand Area, Holywood: Community House

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what his Department can do to help the residents of the Strand area of Holywood in acquiring a community house.

(AQW 26574/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that demand for accommodation in the Holywood area is high. Housing stress has increased steadily from 140 in March 2010 to 196 in March 2013. It would therefore be extremely difficult for the Housing Executive to justify the allocation of one of their dwellings to a community group.

Social and Affordable Housing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made on the introduction of a developer contribution to social and affordable housing; and whether there is a timeline for its implementation.

(AQW 26583/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I remain supportive of introducing a system of developer contributions for affordable housing; indeed, it is a key action in my Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland: Facing the Future.

I have been critically evaluating this issue over the past months and two key factors will impact on the timing of the introduction – appropriate processes need to be in place to manage any regime efficiently and the timing is crucial in light of the challenges facing the construction sector currently. In the present market conditions it is likely to prove extremely difficult to realise contributions.

My officials, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, will reassess this matter shortly to examine whether the housing construction market has had an opportunity to improve sufficiently to allow developer contributions to be introduced.

Housing Executive: Budget

Mr I McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development how he intends to ensure that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive spends its budget in full in this financial year.

(AQO 4677/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Last year the Housing Executive declared easements of £31 million through in year monitoring rounds and Urgent Procedure in March. The easement related mainly to efficiency savings as a result of very keen tender prices for new contracts in the area of response maintenance.

This year, the Housing Executive had identified easements of £10m in June monitoring as planned maintenance procurement has not been completed and contracts have not been let.

It is most disappointing for me to be reporting again that the Housing Executive has identified further easements totalling £35m. The majority of this easement, £24.5m relates to Housing Executive Maintenance Budgets and in particular, delays in issuing new contracts for Planned Maintenance and Double Glazing. The Housing Executive still intends to spend over £100m in property maintenance work with £65m + in planned schemes, and a further £35m + in response maintenance and there will be a full service for tenants to repair heating systems, fix boilers, deal with burst pipes, and other necessary repairs. The issue of contract management is long standing and is a priority for me and the Chairman of the Housing Executive. My officials are working closely with the Housing Executive to maximise spend on the budget in the current financial year.

The Housing Executive has identified former NIHE properties which were sold to tenants under the 'Right to Buy Scheme' and which are now being offered for sale on the open market. A reclassification of revenue funding to capital, to cover the costs of the scheme is proposed and a bid for £10m capital has been made at the October Monitoring Round.

Soft Services: Outsourcing

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development whether a decision has been taken to outsource soft service functions from his Department; and if so, were discussions held with the Department of Finance and Personnel to ascertain if other Departments were outsourcing these functions.

(AQW 26607/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development (DSD) has taken the decision to outsource its Soft Services. This decision was an operational one driven by a need to support business improvement and achieve efficiencies.

The decision by DSD to outsource its Soft Services forms part of a wider NICS-wide procurement exercise being taken forward by DFP for the provision of Security and Ancillary Services within which Departments specify their individual requirements.

Housing: First-time Buyers

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what assistance is available for first time house buyers.

(AQW 26632/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are a number of mechanisms I have introduced to assist first-time buyers (and those returning to the housing market) that are, and will continue to, deliver access to affordable homes. With further funding I have been able to secure for housing in 2013/14, NI Co-Ownership will be able to support the purchase of 900 homes this year. In addition, I have secured additional funding for Co-Ownership housing up to 2014/15, which will deliver an extra 170 homes a year. The Affordable Home Loans fund, which aims to deliver over 600 homes, will allow the advancement of new, affordable housing pilot schemes in Northern Ireland.

My officials continue to consider alternative mechanisms to assist first-time buyers access the housing market. In the interim, HM Treasury will shortly announce the first wave of mortgages available under the Help to Buy Mortgage Guarantee. Under this scheme, lenders across the UK will be able to use Government backed guarantees to offer £130 billion worth of mortgages with smaller deposits, as little as 5%, on new and existing properties.

Child Maintenance Service

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what steps are being taken to rectify the technical problems currently affecting the Child Maintenance Service's computer systems; and what timescales are in place for their resolution.

(AQW 26665/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Child Maintenance Service currently manages 3 separate Child Maintenance Schemes that are each supported by their own IT.

A number of cases on the 1993 and 2003 Schemes and systems have been affected by technical issues which have required the cases to be managed clerically whilst the IT issues are further investigated. Unfortunately this is not an uncommon occurrence on these older systems and many have to be managed clerically for long periods of time.

That is why I was pleased to launch, using a pathfinder approach, a new Child Maintenance system (2012) last December as part of the wider reforms to the child maintenance system. This new scheme is supported by more modern IT and in time will gradually replace the older 1993 and 2003 Schemes and systems. To date, of 9,000 cases registered nationally on this new system, none have needed to be managed clerically and this augurs well for when we move to introduce this Scheme for all new applications here, later this year.

Donaghadee: Public Realm Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the schedule for works to start on the small town public realm project for Donaghadee.

(AQW 26684/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is working with Ards Borough Council on a major £2.5 million public realm scheme for Donaghadee. Council appointed an Integrated Consultancy Team to develop the concept design and complete an economic appraisal. The Economic Appraisal for the scheme was received by the Department on 4th October 2013 for consideration and subject to funding being available and all necessary approvals the scheme should commence in 2014. A more definite timeline for the schedule of works cannot be confirmed until all the necessary approvals are in place.

Housing Executive: Rent Increase

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants' rents will increase to match those in Housing Associations, should their properties be moved into the ownership of Housing Associations as a result of changes within the Housing Executive.

(AQW 26699/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Annual rent increases have been a feature of social housing over many years and are necessary to enable providers such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations to maintain standards. However, I am committed to ensuring rent levels remain affordable and sustainable; and to ensuring that tenants are protected from any excessive or unaffordable rent increases.

As agreed with Executive colleagues, the further exploration of my proposals for the reform of social housing is underway. No decisions have been made as to how rent will be calculated in the future. Rent levels will require detailed analysis of the various options before any decisions can be made. As you will appreciate this will be a critical component in the establishment of the new social housing model which in due course will be subject to the scrutiny and approval of the NI Executive.

Public Realm Schemes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department will be able to deliver the 10 Public Realm Schemes by 31 March 2014.

(AQW 26737/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I can confirm that this milestone for 2013/14 has been achieved and my Department is making good progress to achieve the full Programme for Government commitment to deliver at least 30 Public Realm Schemes by March 2015.

Discretionary Housing Payments

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have (i) applied for; and (ii) received Discretionary Housing Payments in each of the last two years.

(AQW 26745/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The numbers of people who have (i) applied for and (ii) received Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in each of the last two years are detailed in the table below.

Period	Applications	Awards paid
2011/12	10,726	10,299
2012/13	18,766	16,703

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Social Fund Crisis Loan Service: Foyle and Lisnagelvin

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26352/11-15, what action he has taken to reduce the number of calls not answered in the Foyle and Lisnagelvin Jobs and Benefits offices.

(AQW 26770/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Fund Crisis Loan Service is primarily a face to face service delivered at the front office and in addition, a limited telephone service is provided to support this service. The Agency recognises that the telephone service is limited and requires modernisation and, as part of Welfare Reform, a programme of investment is underway which is due for completion next year. This new service will be available to claimants from the Foyle and Lisnagelvin areas. Claimants who cannot currently access the Crisis Loan telephone should call into their local office.

Soft Services: Outsourcing

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has decided to outsource the Soft Services function from his Department.

(AQW 26787/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development has taken the decision to outsource its Soft Services. This decision was an operational one driven by a need to achieve efficiencies.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 1004/11-15, to provide an answer to the question as anticipated in Standing Order 19 (5) which states that a question must be answered as clearly and as fully as possible.

(AQW 26813/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The administrative procedures and processes of Private Office are confidential. The answer to AQW 1004/11-15 was provided on 14th June 2013.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 18 October 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Photographic Services

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much has been paid to photographers, or other service providers, for the provision of photographic services to the Executive for work outside Northern Ireland since May 2007.
(AQW 9879/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Since May 2007, £33,656.51 has been spent on photography provision outside Northern Ireland. In the case of two departments, DEL and DSD, figures (if any) are not available for the entire period.

Expenditure on photography services outside of Northern Ireland incorporates Trade Missions, Ministerial visits and assignments with Ministers in other jurisdictions.

Hong Kong Open and European Golf Tour

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 17449/11-15, which decision-makers and organisers they have met with in relation to the Hong Kong Open and the European Golf Tour.
(AQW 20151/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We met with the Championship Director, Deputy Director for International Policy, the Tournament Director and the Press Director.

We also met with the President, Captain and Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Golf Club and the Hong Kong Assistant Commissioner for Tourism.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr McCarthy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consultation has taken place with representatives of integrated education on the formulation of a Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.
(AQW 20158/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The leasing of the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat building in Armagh is managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel whose name appears on the lease.

When North South Bodies lease property, the name of the Body or the name of the relevant Agency of the Body concerned, appears on all associated legal documentation.

Information Service: Staff

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff are employed in their Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20172/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department's information service provides a range of communication services and a planning, co-ordination and corporate support role across all Executive departments. There are 3 business areas within the department's information service.

1 OFMDFM Ministerial Press Office and Corporate Support

There are currently 5 press officers working directly to the 4 OFMDFM Ministers.

A further member of staff works on publications, the web and social media.

The Director and deputy Director, supported by a Personal Secretary, provide a strategic communications role across the 12 Executive departments.

There are 5 staff in a corporate support role providing a range of services including the central management of cross department contracts and the management of a professional development programme for EIS staff across all of the departments.

The total cost for these staff in 2012/13 was £779,952.

2 Government Advertising Unit

There are currently 15 staff (12.5 full time equivalent) employed in the Government Advertising Unit. The Unit is a shared service centre, funded and governed by the 12 Executive departments. It applies specialist expertise to the management of government advertising to improve value for money and effectiveness in communicating with the public. The Unit delivered estimated savings of more than £1.2 million gross to the public sector during 2011/12.

3 NI Direct

There are currently 7 staff employed in the Central Editorial Team of NI Direct. The team is responsible for the development and maintenance of the NI Direct website which comprises citizen-facing information and services from all Departments. The team is not directly funded by OFMDFM but is funded through DFP's NI Direct programme. Since the site went live in April 2009 it has had 28 million visits and delivered 70 million page impressions.

North/South Ministerial Council: Leasing Property

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, when the North/South Ministerial Council or any other North/South body leases property, what name appears in the legal documentation on behalf of the interests of the North/South body concerned. (AQW 20562/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The leasing of the North/South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat building in Armagh is managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel whose name appears on the lease.

When North/South Bodies lease property, the name of the Body or the name of the relevant Agency of the Body concerned, appears on all associated legal documentation.

Armed Forces Covenant: Report 2012

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why their Department's view was unobtainable when it was sought prior to the publication of the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2012. (AQW 20935/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Rt Hon Philip Hammond, Secretary of State for Defence, wrote to us in June 2012 regarding the commencement of work on producing the first Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant and requesting our co-operation with compiling the report. We replied on 24 July 2012 suggesting that officials could discuss the details of the input with the Ministry of Defence. The Armed Forces is a reserved matter, but liaison arrangements exist with Executive departments in areas such as healthcare and housing.

Armed Forces Covenant: Implementation in Northern Ireland

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide dates and details of any meetings, including attendees, that they have had with representatives of Her Majesty's Government to discuss the extension of the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland. (AQW 20936/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There has been a range of discussions to date between NI officials and Ministry of Defence officials and we expect these will continue. There is no central record kept of the liaison arrangements and discussions which take place.

United States and Brazil Visit

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) who accompanied them on their recent visit to the United States and Brazil; (ii) the accommodation in which they stayed; and (iii) the itinerary for their visit. (AQW 21043/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Consistent with the minimum practise elsewhere we were each accompanied by a special adviser, a private secretary and a press officer. We also brought an official photographer with us, who had been selected through the normal tendering process. Support was provided by staff from the NI Bureau, NI Screen and the local Invest NI representatives.

All hotel accommodation was booked on advice of the embassies and consulates in each city. Their recommendations took into account security and safety issues, the availability of meeting rooms for press interviews or speaking engagements and the embassy rate for foreign delegations.

Details of the itinerary relating to our recent visit to Brazil and the USA were published by the Executive Information Service through a series of press releases and photographs. Copies of all those releases and photographs are available at the following websites:

- www.northernireland.gov.uk/news
- www.flickr.com/photos/niexecutive/sets/72157633036155586
- www.flickr.com/photos/niexecutive/sets/72157632960681381

Magdalene Laundries

Mr Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department has taken to ensure that the voices of women in Northern Ireland who were subjected to abuse in the Magdalene laundries or homes will be heard. (AQW 21302/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following the publication of the McAleese Report, we appointed a senior civil servant to draw up a scoping paper in regard to the Magdalene Laundry type institutions that operated here so as to inform us of what potential actions we might be able to take.

We received that report just prior to recess and we are currently giving serious consideration to the options that have been laid out before deciding the way forward.

Under the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse, any woman who entered a Laundry here before she was 18 may contribute to the Inquiry, including recounting their childhood experiences to the Inquiry's Acknowledgement Forum and having those experiences acknowledged.

However, anyone who has experienced abuse of any kind is encouraged to report this to the PSNI and Social Services for investigation, whether the context of their experience falls within the scope of the current Inquiry or not. Where appropriate, the alleged perpetrators can then be brought before the courts. This is the primary means by which victims and survivors can seek justice for what happened to them.

Assembly Written Questions

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of Assembly Written Questions asked of their Department since September 2012; (ii) the number of questions for ordinary written answer which the Department has not answered within the designated timeframe; and (iii) the number of priority questions which the Department has not answered within the designated timeframe. (AQW 21351/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The figures provided below relate to Assembly Questions asked within the period September 2012 – February 2013:

- (i) 249
- (ii) 125
- (iii) 25

Constitutional Convention

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister is a member of the Constitutional Convention of the Republic of Ireland in that capacity as shown in its membership list; and, if not, whether they require the matter to be corrected. (AQW 22397/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The deputy First Minister was nominated to this body by Sinn Féin. Its membership list is not a matter for OFMDFM.

Community Relations Spending

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the £0.5 billion that has been spent on community relations has been contributed by their Department. (AQW 23495/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The figure of £0.5 billion is an approximate figure which includes European Regional and Peace Programme monies (approx €330 million), as well as expenditure by the International Fund for Ireland, the Atlantic Philanthropies and various government Departments.

In the period from 2007 until 2015, our department will have committed funding of approximately £73 million to good relations activities and a further £70 million towards Victims and Survivors.

The contribution from our department has been significant. Not simply in financial terms, but also in driving policy and internal government support for the good relations agenda.

Together: Building a United Community

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the financial implications of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4249/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The details of the costs for actions arising from the Together: Building a United Community Strategy will be worked up in the design groups that have been established to take this work forward. We will make the full details public in due course when this work is completed.

Together: Building a United Community

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what are the budgetary plans for delivering the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4254/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The budgetary plans for delivery of the actions arising out of the Together: Building a United Community will be assessed once the Design Teams have reported.

Together: Building a United Community

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline his plans for reassessing the financial costs of providing public services as part of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4256/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Avoidance of unnecessary expenditure or duplication in the provision of public services is a core aspect of the new Strategy.

Together: Building a United Community

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the announcements they made on the Together: Building A United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4240/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Design teams have been meeting to draw up detailed proposals to implement the actions in the new Strategy. It is our intention that the plans and proposals that arise from these teams are robust and no decisions will be taken on the specific aspects of the programmes until the design teams conclude their work.

We have appointed Dr Richard Haass as the independent chair of an all-party group which will consider and make recommendations on matters including parades and protests; flags, symbols and emblems and the past. We are confident that we will be able to find lasting solutions.

Together: Building a United Community

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when an action plan will be produced for the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4241/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The key actions have already been announced and design teams to draw up detailed proposals to implement the actions in the new Strategy have started to meet. It is our intention that the plans and proposals that arise from these teams are robust.

An All-Party Group, chaired by Richard Haass, will consider and make recommendations on matters, including parades and protests; flags, symbols, emblems and related matters; and dealing with the past.

Inward Investment

Mr McAleer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following their investment visit to China and other recent overseas engagements, for an update on Executive efforts to stimulate inward investment.

(AQO 4243/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A key focus of the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 is to grow the economy. The Executive is committed to bringing investment, jobs, tourists, new skills and best practice into Northern Ireland by promoting local capabilities and developing mutually beneficial relationships with targeted countries, regions and international organisations.

Our overseas efforts are paying dividends and we aim to continue to meet influencers and business representatives to promote trade, tourism, inward investment, university and government links. Securing international projects requires long-term relationship building and raising awareness of the many advantages of investing in Northern Ireland. Executive Ministers will continue to be proactive in targeting countries and organisations in an effort to secure trade and investment opportunities.

Together: Building a United Community: Urban Villages

Mr Douglas asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the four Urban Village Regeneration projects which were included in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQO 4244/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are considering where best to situate the Urban Villages to achieve maximum benefit from the proposal and intend to make a further announcement on the detail of these in due course.

Public Assemblies, Parades and Protest Body

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the anticipated work of the Public Assemblies, Parades and Protest Body during the rest of this Assembly mandate.

(AQW 24218/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The All-Party Group, chaired by Richard Haass, will consider and make recommendations on matters including, parades and protests; flags, symbols and emblems and related matters; and dealing with the past.

Farming Life

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how much the Executive Information Service has paid to the Farming Life section of the Newsletter, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 24352/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The information requested is not held centrally by the Executive Information Service (EIS).

The Government Advertising Unit, which is part of EIS, does place advertisements on behalf of all NICS departments, agencies and some ALBs. Details in relation to these costs are held by departments.

EIS can confirm that over the past three years, classified advertising has been placed in the Farming Life as follows:

- 2012/13 - DARD, NI Policing Board, Roads Service
- 2011/12 – DARD, Roads Service
- 2010/11 – DARD, Roads Service

Over this same period, campaign advertising has been placed in the Farming Life as follows:

- 2012/13 – DETI, HSENI, Invest NI, NI Water, DARD
- 2011/12 – DARD, HSENI
- 2010/11 – DARD, NMNI, NISRA

Visa Waiver

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the proposal in the recent 'economic pact' for people who are travelling on an Irish visa to Northern Ireland will work in practice; and how this will differ, in the short and long term, in respect of such persons visiting the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 24922/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The economic package, 'Building a Prosperous and United Community', was announced on 14 June 2013 and ratified by the Executive on 27 June. We welcome the proposals contained in the economic package to develop visa waiver arrangements between the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

The Irish Government introduced a visa waiver scheme, accepting visitors from 17 countries with a UK visit visa for travel to the Republic of Ireland without applying for a separate Irish visa. Under a reciprocal visa arrangement, the UK Government will, subject to appropriate safeguards and to agreement between the UK and Irish Governments, aim to work towards a pilot visa waiver reciprocation by the UK which would permit visitors from some destinations to enter the UK using an Irish visit visa, without the need for a separate UK visa.

The development of a pilot scheme should provide the platform to drive our ambition to make tourism a £1 billion industry by 2020. It should make it easier for tourists and business people visiting the Republic of Ireland, travelling only on an Irish Visa, to include the UK in their trip. This measure should provide an important boost to the Executive's drive to increase tourism revenue to £676 million and visitor numbers to 4.2 million by December 2014.

Haass Talks: Cost

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the administrative and other costs of the Haass talks are being funded; and what is the estimated total involved.

(AQW 25926/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The costs relating to the work of the Panel of Parties are being met by OFMDFM.

Neither Richard Haass nor Meghan O'Sullivan are taking a fee for their time, which is testament to their commitment to this process. Both have offered their services on a pro bono basis and they will therefore only be reimbursed for the expenses they incur. We have also agreed to pay remuneration to their researcher and to cover any other costs and expenses directly relating to Dr Haass's work.

At this stage it is not possible to provide an estimate of the overall cost. This will be assessed on a continuing basis as work progresses over the next three months.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations they have made to the Government regarding the retention of the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

(AQO 4597/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Minister of the Environment, and his predecessor, have taken every opportunity to argue the case for retaining the DVA facility in Northern Ireland through their responses to consultations on the proposal and directly with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and the Transport Minister. We have raised the issue with the Prime Minister on a number of occasions when we have met over recent months.

Together: Building a United Community: Education Campuses

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the ten shared education campuses identified for delivery as part of the Building a United Community Strategy.

(AQW 26162/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our commitment to establish ten shared education campuses is being taken forward by a design group specifically established to research and detail proposals and costs for implementation. The design group is expected to conclude its work in the next few months and its report will inform Ministerial decisions on the specific projects and geographical areas.

Community Empowerment Partnership

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail each Director of the Community Empowerment Partnership in 2003.

(AQW 26355/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Information on Directors of the Community Empowerment Partnerships in 2003 is no longer held.

Community Empowerment Partnership

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the proposals made by the Community Empowerment Partnership, including those that relate to primary schools.

(AQW 26356/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The information requested is not centrally available and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

Social Investment Fund

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the outlay of funding from the Social Investment Fund to date; and to list the parties in receipt of these funds.

(AQW 26377/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: To date, £389,847 has been spent in relation to the preparation for delivery, such as provision of support to develop area plans, economic appraisals and undertaking Gateway Reviews of the programme. The parties in receipt of these funds were RSM McClure Watters, Wallace Consulting, Deloitte, Copius Consulting and Central Procurement Directorate.

Bright Start

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assurances they can give that the 7000 additional childcare places committed by Bright Start: a Strategic Framework for a Childcare Strategy will be sufficient to meet the shortage in provision.

(AQW 26653/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Bright Start's key first actions aim to address the main childcare priorities identified during the consultation process. In response to an identified need for additional childcare provision, the key first actions aim to create or sustain several thousand childcare places. These are first actions. Their performance will be monitored and evaluated to assess what further steps are needed to address childcare provision over the life of the Bright Start strategy.

Bright Start

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an estimate of the (i) cost; and (ii) timescale to deliver Bright Start: the Strategic Framework for a Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 26656/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department is currently working on the detailed costings of several of the key first actions set out in the first phase of Bright Start. This work will estimate the cost of delivery. We aim to have all 15 key first actions initiated before the end of the 2013/14 financial year.

Bright Start

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the rationale for the moratorium on Executive advertising, which may impede the ability of Bright Start: the Strategic Framework for a Childcare Strategy to deliver on the key aim to improve the information available to families regarding childcare cost assistance.

(AQW 26657/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There is no moratorium on Executive Advertising. On 7 March 2013, the Executive approved the Executive's Advertising Programme 2013/14 of almost £14 million. This equates to more than £1 million a month on campaign advertising. Under the Executive Advertising Programme, all campaigns are clearly aligned to the Programme for Government. The commissioning process for the Executive's Advertising Programme 2014/15 is currently underway and all departments are now assessing their campaign advertising requirements for 2014/15.

Together: Building a United Community: Apprenticeships

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the provision of the additional apprenticeship posts outlined in Together: Providing a United Community, including (i) when the posts will be available; (ii) in which industries; and (iii) in which constituencies.

(AQW 26849/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The process of designing the United Youth volunteer programme is being taken forward by a design group specifically established to research and detail proposals and costs for implementation.

Until that work is completed no decisions will be made on specific aspects of the Programme as outlined above.

The design group is expected to conclude its work later this year and its report will inform Ministerial decisions on the way forward.

Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the estimated cost of decontaminating the former Shackleton army barracks at Ballykelly; (ii) the cost of maintenance since the site was acquired; and (iii) the number of inquiries from potential investors in the last 12 months.

(AQW 26879/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) The estimated costs for decontaminating the former Shackleton Army barracks at Ballykelly are in the region of:

Consultancy/Investigations	£900k to £1,100k
Remediation and Disposal	£5m to £7m
Total	£5.9m to £8.1m

- (ii) Shackleton was acquired in October 2011. Maintenance costs from this date amount to the end of the last financial year were £310,756.

- (iii) There have been in excess of 60 enquiries from potential investors in the last 12 months.

Magilligan: Decommissioning of Land

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations have been made to the Ministry of Defence to decommission land at Magilligan which is currently used as a shooting range, and therefore out of bounds to the public including walkers and tourists.

(AQW 26880/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not made any representations at this time to the Ministry of Defence in respect of the decommissioning of land at Magilligan.

Economic Pact

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the preparations for the review of fiscal powers, which were agreed as part of the Economic Pact proposals with the British Government, including the processes for developing the terms of reference, key approaches and timescale for the review.

(AQO 4651/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Economic Package 'Building a Prosperous and United Community' was announced on 14 June and ratified by the Executive on 27 June and includes a commitment to examine the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers. As part of the package, the Government and Executive agreed that the devolution of further tax powers might have the potential to enable the local economy to respond in a more tailored way to the social and economic challenges that we face. The Government and the Executive have already agreed to devolve to the Assembly the power to set Air Passenger Duty on long-haul flights, helping to preserve our vital air link to the United States.

We recognise that decisions around any further fiscal devolution require careful consideration and analysis. As a first stage of this work, the Department of Finance and Personnel is currently undertaking a scoping exercise to examine the Calman and Silk Commission reports, the positions taken in respect of each individual tax and the wider financial context in that regard.

After that, a work programme will be developed to progress this exercise in order to put recommendations, if any, for further devolution to Executive and Government Ministers by autumn 2014.

As part of the package, it was also agreed to take forward further work on Corporation Tax devolution and the package also indicated that the Government would make a final decision on the devolution of these powers no later than the Autumn Statement 2014.

Poverty

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the growing pressures faced by voluntary and charitable organisations, such as St. Vincent de Paul, in their efforts to address and alleviate poverty.

(AQO 4769/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We understand that voluntary and charitable organisations like St Vincent de Paul are facing ever greater pressures in their efforts to tackle poverty. The reasons for these growing pressures appear to be two-fold. Firstly, as the downturn in the economy continues to bite, an ever increasing number of families and individuals are approaching such organisations seeking financial support. And secondly, there's a sense that the level of funding for these organisations may have peaked, and that, indeed, it may be about to fall back. This is partly as a result of the economic downturn, but also because some who contributed previously are now looking for support themselves. In short, these organisations are being asked to help a growing number of people with a potentially decreasing budget.

In this time of global economic challenge, the Executive remains focused on growing our economy whilst at the same time tackling social and economic disadvantage. However, the difficulties being experienced currently by organisations like St Vincent de Paul serve to increase the Executive's commitment to do all it can to alleviate poverty.

With this in mind, Our Delivering Social Change inter-departmental framework has been developed to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty across all ages; and an improvement in the health, wellbeing and life opportunities of children and young people thereby breaking the long-term cycle of multi-generational problems.

Six signature programmes are helping drive this forward. We are helping struggling pupils with literacy and numeracy; we are providing positive parenting programmes; we have established 10 Family Support Hubs, 10 Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs and 20 additional nurture units; and we are committed to providing young people not in education, employment or training with skills programmes.

Delivering Social Change also complements the much larger social and economic policies and programmes that have been designed to tackle poverty, by identifying clear lines of departmental accountability and delivering additional actions that can add real value and achieve measurable improvements.

Social Investment Fund: Area Plans

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether Strategic Action Plans have been produced for all nine regions identified to benefit from the Social Investment Fund.

(AQO 4773/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 28 February, the Social Investment Fund Steering Groups submitted area plans for each of their Zones.

Representatives of the wider community were involved in identifying the issues to be addressed and prioritising the interventions for inclusion in the plans thus ensuring that they reflect needs identified locally.

The plans included a total of 89 projects across 9 Zones. These proposals are now going through a quality assurance review by officials. This will ensure that projects are robust and will have a positive impact within their communities.

Child Poverty: National Children's Bureau

Mr Hazzard asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the steps recommended by the National Children's Bureau to help departments tackle child poverty.

(AQO 4776/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The National Children's Bureau and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes developed a Child Poverty Outcomes Framework, as commissioned by our Department in February 2012.

The Child Poverty Outcomes Framework was published on the Department's website on 4 October 2013. The purpose of this Model is to assess which interventions are likely to produce the best outcomes over the long-term and to assess the impact of mainstream programmes already in place.

The starting point of establishing the framework is to establish clear outcomes for children and young people towards which Government departments and other stakeholders can direct their efforts. The Outcomes Framework comprises a set of clearly defined outcomes and indicators; exemplar balanced scorecards; and advice and guidance on using the Outcomes Framework.

The next steps will involve using this suggested framework as the basis for undertaking capacity building activities across all departments. The data presented in the report will be used as the basis for undertaking a series of workshops, which can then be used to populate balanced scorecards for all of the indicators included in the report. The first of these workshops for Senior Civil Servants was held last week.

The Child Poverty Outcomes Framework will be taken forward under the auspices of Delivering Social Change, the Executive's comprehensive delivery framework to co-ordinate the efforts across departments to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages and an improvement in children and young people's health, wellbeing and life opportunities thereby breaking the cycle of multi-generational problems.

Immediate action to deliver improvements is already underway with the implementation on the ground of six Delivering Social Change signature projects on key priorities including improving literacy and numeracy levels, family support and pathways to employment framework for young people. Work on the implementation of the six initial signature projects is progressing well.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Sport: Facilities in Fermanagh and Tyrone

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding offers made for sports or partial sports facilities in the constituencies of (i) Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and (ii) West Tyrone, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26410/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): No such offers have been made by DARD. The Quality of Life Axis (Axis 3) of the Rural Development Programme is delivered through the LEADER approach by seven Joint Council Committees working with Local Action Groups in council cluster areas. Two such clusters, South West Action for Rural Development (SWARD) and Assisting Rural Communities North West (ARC NW), cover the two constituencies referred to in your question and are responsible for opening calls, assessing applications and awarding funding.

Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme does not provide funding for sport facilities for direct sporting activity. However, where an organisation wishes to promote a project that benefits the wider rural community and which is separate from their primary activity, this may be considered for funding by the LAGs and JCCs.

The following list details rural development projects funded by SWARD and ARC which do include facilities that could be used for sporting activity, albeit as part of wider rural quality of life initiatives that benefit the broader rural community:

Org Name	Project Title	location	Grant Awarded	Letter of Offer Issued	Constituency
Strabane District Council	Youth Multi Use Games Area x 3	Strabane	250,000.00	11/09/2012	West Tyrone
Aghyaran Development Association CIC	Aghyaran Multi Use Recreational Area	Castlederg	135,430.50	19/09/2012	West Tyrone
Strabane District Council	Plumbridge Health and Recreation Project (MUGA)	Strabane	186,135.47	20/06/2013	West Tyrone

Org Name	Project Title	location	Grant Awarded	Letter of Offer Issued	Constituency
Tyrone County GAA Committee (CLG Thir Eoghain)	Garvaghey 3G Multi-Activity Pitch	Omagh	594,656.60	28/11/2012	West Tyrone
Fermanagh District Council	Provision of 3G floodlit pitch suitable for multi-purpose use	Enniskillen	599,973.00	29/03/2013	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Fermanagh District Council	Fermanagh 5 x MUGA's	Enniskillen	471,961.00	29/03/2013	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Ballinamallard Fisher Park	Ballinamallard Community Recreation Hub (3G)	Ballinamallard	283,509.00	29/03/2013	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Greencastle St.Patricks GFC	Greencastle CORE (Community Outdoor Recreational Ent) MUGA	Omagh	380,871.00	21/02/2013	West Tyrone
Strabane District Council	Glebe Community Park Regeneration (MUGA)	Strabane	165,075.00	30/09/2013	West Tyrone
Strabane District Council	Glenmornan Multi Use Games Area	Strabane	143,662.50	30/09/2013	West Tyrone
Loughmacrory Development Association	Running track, spectator stand, boats and jetties.	Omagh	824,491	28/03/2013	West Tyrone
Dungannon & South Tyrone Council	Rural Recreational and Healthy Living Hubs; 2 MUGA's and 1 pavilion	Benburb & Ballygawley MUGA's; Fivemiletown Pavilion	484,787	11/12/12	Fermanagh & South Tyrone

Single Farm Payment: Reviews

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how long it has taken to process the (i) stage one; and (ii) stage two reviews of Single Farm Payment decisions, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 26415/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The average time to process a Stage 1 and Stage 2 review is highly variable depending on the particular nature and complexity of the casework in a particular year. In many cases there is a need to seek additional information from the applicant, other parties involved and, in some instances, legal advice is required. Stage 2 cases on average involve more complex considerations and take longer.

The figures shown below provide an estimate of the average time taken to process review cases (that is, from the date of application until the decision letter issues) in the three years shown. These averages are shown in calendar days and, therefore, include weekends, public holidays and privilege holidays.

While I recognise that the averages include time taken to process a significant number of cases that originated in 2006/2007 and which could not be processed for several years until legal proceedings had been concluded and assessed, I am concerned about the overall time taken to process review cases and have asked if these processes can be reviewed and timescales reduced.

(i) Stage 1

In 2011, the time taken to process a Stage 1 application from receipt to decision issued averaged at 263 calendar days. In 2012, the average was 186 calendar days and in 2013 (to date) the average is 205 calendar days.

(ii) Stage 2

In 2011, the time taken to process a Stage 2 application from receipt to decision issued averaged at 975 calendar days. In 2012, the average was, 1,383 calendar days and in 2013 (to date) the average is 612 calendar days.

Farm Safety

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 14346/11-15, whether additional research in relation to safety and slurry handling has been (i) considered; and (ii) undertaken following consideration by the Farm Safety Partnership.

(AQW 26417/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The need for additional research in relation to safety and slurry handling has been considered by my Department in conjunction with the Farm Safety Partnership.

As a result my Department has commissioned a research project at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute on 'Safe Practice in Slurry Mixing Operations'. The focus of the project is to identify and evaluate slurry gas mitigation measures. The project has recently commenced and is expected to conclude by mid-2014.

Stud Farms: Rate Relief

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 26224/11-15, whether her Department will make the case to the Department of Finance and Personnel for rate relief for stud farms.

(AQW 26614/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It will be a matter for the equine sector to make a case for stud farm rate relief to my Department for consideration before any formal engagement with the Department of Finance and Personnel. My officials are working closely with the Equine Council for NI (ECNI) on the matter. ECNI has recently submitted a discussion paper to my Department and this will be the basis for future consideration of the issue. Any consideration of rate relief for stud farms must establish the need, assess the economic benefit, be affordable, consider alternative support measures, align with Programme for Government priorities, and be compliant with EU State Aid rules.

Severe Weather: Emergency Helicopter Services

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the basis on which she is challenging the invoice from the Ministry of Defence for emergency helicopter services provided to rural communities in distress during the severe weather in Spring 2013.

(AQW 26642/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware that extreme snow falls affected many parts of the north of Ireland in March of this year. As part of my Department's response, I approached the British Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, asking for helicopter assistance to be made available for animal welfare reasons. I also obtained support from the Irish Air Corps after speaking to the Justice Minister Alan Shatter TD.

The airborne resources provided by both the British MoD and the Irish Air Corps greatly assisted our emergency efforts and were very much welcomed by the industry and my Department.

The Irish Air Corps have not requested any payment for their participation.

Whilst I appreciate that it is British MoD policy to charge full costs for its services, given the extreme conditions and animal welfare emergency that existed at the time, it was disappointing to have received such a substantial charge. I therefore considered that it was appropriate to write to the British Secretary of Defence to ask him to reconsider this policy given the emergency circumstances that existed.

Severe Weather: Rescue and Support Services

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the invoices received, from both public and private sector organisations, as a result of rescue and support services during the severe weather at Spring 2013; and whether she is challenging these.

(AQW 26643/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During the snow storm in March this year, part of my Department's immediate response was to air drop fodder to stranded livestock cut off by the heavy snow. The Irish Air Corps and the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) provided helicopter support to allow the air drops to take place. In addition to the air drops my Department arranged for the collection and disposal of carcasses resulting from the severe weather.

The Irish Air Corps has not charged for their participation.

My Department is in receipt of a bill of costs from the British Government and I have written to the British Secretary of State for Defence to ask him to reconsider his departments policy of charging for its services given the emergency circumstances that existed at the time.

With respect to the carcase collection and rendering costs which the Department is meeting, due to commercial confidentiality I am unable to disclose the details of invoices received. However I can confirm that interim payments have been made to two private companies and that the final payments will be made when the final invoices are received and agreed. My Department is not currently challenging any invoices from rendering companies but all invoice lines are verified and validated before payment is approved.

Potato Breeding Programme

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in regards to the potato breeding programme at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute at Loughgall, to outline the (i) process; and (ii) timescale for the commercialisation of the new Loughgall potato varieties.

(AQW 26649/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: New variety propagation for potatoes is a protracted, resource intensive process. At AFBI it is divided into two separate projects: strategic and commercial.

The strategic (core) research involves the production of parental and pre-breeding material. During this phase cross pollination results in seeds which are grown. Seedlings are then evaluated and selected plants grown for three years. Successful plants which carry required characteristics then become part of the commercial research.

The Commercial research involves propagating those chosen varieties for a further four years under various growing conditions. For Loughgall varieties that will include trials in Morocco and in Britain, the main markets for our seed potatoes. There is a parallel selection and evaluation system by the Loughgall programme.

The final decision on which seedlings are to become varieties is made jointly at year 8/9. Variety registration takes two years during which time pre-commercial seed production is scaled up and large-scale on-farm demonstration trials are carried out in the target markets.

The release of a registered variety will coincide with commercial quantities of seed ready to be sold to customers who have already been able to assess the variety in demonstration trials.

Employment: Going for Growth

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, further to the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise's recent enrolment drive in which they state the agri-food industry is planning 15,000 new jobs, whether funding has been made available to enable the sector to achieve this level of growth, as laid out in the Agri-Food Strategy Board's Strategic Action Plan - Going for Growth.

(AQW 26679/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I hope that you will join me in supporting CAFRE's continued provision of world class education in Agriculture and Food. As you will be aware, the Executive has made a commitment under the Programme for Government for a Strategic Action Plan to be developed for the agri-food sector. The industry, through the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB), has identified opportunities for sustainable growth and targeted increased employment in these sectors and this is something that we all hope for.

The AFSB's Strategic Action Plan, Going for Growth, is currently being considered by Government Departments, Agencies and the Board itself to identify the best way to take forward its numerous and wide-ranging recommendations.

The recommendations made by the Board are directed at both Government and industry and the investment the Board has identified from both is significant. From a Government perspective, Departments are exploring the various mechanisms across Government that could provide funding to support sustainable growth in the sector, including the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and the European Regional Development Fund 2014-2020, both of which are currently out for consultation and Invest NI's Selective Financial Assistance Programme. In the current economic climate, implementation of some of the recommendations will be very challenging for the Executive and we will need to look carefully at the resource implications of proposals.

We plan to seek Executive endorsement of the proposed way forward in response to the Board's report in the near future.

Fracking

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many individuals and groups have responded to her regarding the possibility of fracking on land owned by her Department.

(AQW 26701/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Three individuals and one group have contacted me about the possibility of fracking on land owned by my Department.

Animal Welfare: Circuses

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work is taking place on a North/South basis to look at the issue of wild animals in circuses.

(AQW 26710/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I raised the issue of wild animals in travelling circuses at the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Agriculture meeting on 10 July 2013. Minister Coveney and I agreed that officials would investigate the possibility of an All-Island approach to the issue of these animals in travelling circuses, and that the findings and proposals would be reported at a future NSMC Agriculture meeting.

My officials met officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the auspices of the North South Animal Welfare and Transport Working Group on 5 September 2013. The issue of wild animals in circuses was discussed in detail and a number of actions were agreed to be taken forward including engagement with stakeholders who would be directly affected by any proposals on the use of these animals in travelling circuses. Officials will report back to Minister Coveney and I once these actions have been completed.

Farming: Child Safety

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has undertaken, or plans to undertake, any projects with schools to highlight to young children the risks associated with the farming environment.

(AQW 26789/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department as a member of the Farm Safety Partnership support all the actions set out in the Partnership's Action plan. There are two specific actions assigned to HSENI which involve school children. These are:

- Deliver key farm safety messages to 90 rural primary schools throughout NI annually.
- Hold an annual Child Safety on Farms Poster Competition in June.

My Department has provided funding for the Farm Safety Multi-media campaign which is targeted at farmers and their families including school children.

All Farm Safe Awareness courses while targeted at farmers, welcome children and farm families.

CAFRE has also delivered the farm safe message at events where school children can be present.

CAFRE: Advisory Group

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who has been appointed to the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise College Advisory Group and to detail (i) the total membership; and (ii) the remit of the Group.

(AQW 27126/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The following people have been appointed to the College Advisory Group (CAG) of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE): Mrs Hilda Stewart (chair), Mr Mark Beattie; Mrs. Teresa Canavan; Mr James Coyle; Mr. Allan Chambers; Mr. John Chambers; Mr Ivor Ferguson; Mr. Hamilton Hassard; Mr. Maynard Mawhinney; Professor David McDowell; Mr Liam McStravick; Dr Patrick Murphy and Mr Jason Podris.

The remit of CAG is to provide advice at a strategic and operational level to the College Director and the College Management Team of CAFRE. The group reports to the College Director. In discharging its responsibilities, CAG will take proper account of Department's agreed policies and strategies.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Commonwealth Games: Queen's Baton

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 23749/11-15, to outline the role which she and her Department played in promoting and marking the arrival of the Olympic Torch; and why a different approach is being taken to the arrival of the Queen's Baton in connection with the Commonwealth Games.

(AQW 25502/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Responsibility for promoting and marking the arrival of the Olympic Torch rested, in the first instance, with the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG). Likewise responsibility for the Queen's Baton rests with the NI Commonwealth Games Council.

Foras na Gaeilge: Budget

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how much of its annual budget Foras na Gaeilge has spent on (i) staff costs; (ii) general operating costs; (iii) core-funding organisations; (iv) project funding; and (v) other costs, in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 25562/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The details of the breakdown of the annual budgets of Foras na Gaeilge since 2008 are shown in the tables below. The final audited figures for 2011 and 2012 have not yet been published.

		(i) Foras na Gaeilge Staff Costs (* note 1)	(ii) FnG Other Operating Costs (* note 2)
2008	€	3,470,805	5,013,542
	£	2,763,801	3,992,287
2009	€	3,320,942	5,508,800
	£	2,958,627	4,907,790
2010	€	3,283,985	5,039,148
	£	2,817,330	4,323,090
2011	€	4,301,711	4,176,953
	£	3,733,455	3,625,178
2012	€	4,395,430	4,614,636
	£	3,564,254	3,742,008

Notes:

- 1 Staff costs include: Salaries and Wages, Board Member Fees, Social Security Costs and Superannuation Costs
- 2 Other Operating Costs include: Programme Costs, Administration Expenses, Establishment Expenses and Financial Charges

		(iii) &(iv) Core-funding Organisations and Project Funding (total grant expenditure including corefunded organisations)	(v) Other Costs – Direct Printing Costs	(vi) Other Costs – Depreciation Costs
2008	€	14,544,592	1,626,757	137,403
	£	11,581,859	1,295,386	109,414
2009	€	12,749,514	1,516,535	99,973
	£	11,358,542	1,351,081	89,066
2010	€	12,629,789	1,202,533	119,462
	£	10,835,096	1,031,653	102,486
2011	€	12,055,694	1,008,530	102,847
	£	10,463,137	875,303	89,261
2012	€	11,807,825	860,129	95,658
	£	9,574,966	697,479	77,569

Commonwealth Games: Bid

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what work her Department has carried out on the possibility of hosting the Commonwealth Games.

(AQW 25705/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Planning and preparation of any bid to host future Commonwealth Games in the north of Ireland is a matter, in the first instance, for the NI Commonwealth Games Council.

Commonwealth Games 2014: Hosting Teams

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has had discussions with the Scottish Government regarding the hosting of sports teams who are participating in the Commonwealth Games 2014.

(AQW 25945/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have been in correspondence with the Scottish Government with regard to potential overall opportunities that may be open to the north of Ireland during the Glasgow Games in 2014.

Councils: Closure of Facilities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any evidence of a growing trend in councils of closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis; and if any funded activities are under pressure from closure or additional funding requirements.

(AQW 26447/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My department, and its associated arm's-length bodies, has no evidence of a growing trend in councils closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially funded by Government and/or European funding. Similarly, I am not aware of any funded activities that are under pressure from closure or additional funding requirements.

Libraries: Bangor, Donaghadee and Newtownards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of members of (i) Bangor; (ii) Donaghadee; and (iii) Newtownards libraries, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26530/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The number of active members for (i) Bangor; (ii) Donaghadee; and (iii) Newtownards libraries, in each of the last three years is as follows:

Branch	01-Apr-2011	01-Apr-2012	01-Apr-2013
(i) Bangor Library	9,924	11,399	10,575
(ii) Donaghadee Library	2,227	2,267	2,152
(ii) Newtownards Library	3,452	3,949	3,508

Sport Northern Ireland: Security of Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the guidelines and regulations Sport NI impose on the duration of the security on an asset required when a grant is provided to a sporting club.

(AQW 26621/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In cases where security on an asset is required when a grant is issued to a sporting club, historically Sport NI aligned the duration of security with the estimated economic life of the asset that was being purchased or built with the grant award. However, from July 2013 the Sport NI Board approved a revised policy, whereby the required duration of security will be based on the benefits realisation period of the project/programme as opposed to the economic life of the asset. This is reflective of the guidance within Managing Public Money NI and relevant Dear Accounting Officer letters issued by DFP.

Sport Northern Ireland: Security of Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the criteria that is used by Sport NI when deciding whether a grant requires security.

(AQW 26622/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI's Risk Management Policy requires security on a capital award in the following circumstances:

- On all grant awards in excess of £500k; and/or
- On an organisation that is not deemed to be currently operationally viable and solvent, or has major issues surrounding their viability, regardless of the value of the grant award.

Football: Designation of Grounds

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are plans to review the categories of football ground designation.

(AQW 26623/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under The Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006 legislation, my Department may, by order, designate - as a sports grounds requiring a safety certificate – any sports ground which in its opinion has accommodation for more than 5,000 spectators.

While the legislation does not include any reference to categories of designation, I can confirm that there are no plans to review the associated statutory process, or review the accommodation capacity which is stated within the legislation.

The Department has already designated fifteen football grounds and a full list is set out in The Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) (No.2) Order (NI) 2009.

Velodrome

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration has been given, in conjunction with the Dublin government, to the provision of a velodrome.

(AQW 26730/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials have met with the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport to explore the feasibility of joint working and financing of key projects that might service the whole of Ireland, including a velodrome.

That said, responsibility for bringing forward proposals for the development of a cycling velodrome rests in the first instance with the governing body of the sport, Cycling Ireland.

Any possible investment for such a facility could only be considered in the context of a clear, co-ordinated strategy for the sport, developed by the governing body that, in turn, matches with my own priorities for sport as a whole.

Any proposal would need to set out how any such facility would be sustainable going forward.

Giro d'Italia 2014: Legacy

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the discussions she has had with cycling bodies to ensure a lasting legacy following the Giro d'Italia 2014.

(AQW 26736/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, is working with a large number of cycling bodies to ensure a lasting legacy following the Giro d'Italia.

As part of the Giro d'Italia 'Big Start 2014' Activation Committee Sport NI chairs a Cycling Sub Group which includes membership from CTC (the national charity), Sustrans, Cycling Ireland, Cycling Ulster and a number of district councils.

This Group feeds into a draft Legacy Plan to accompany the Giro Big Start 2014. That plan also encompasses input from a range of other government departments, agencies/organisations such as Volunteer Now and the district councils.

Sport: Facilities in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding offers made for sports or partial sports facilities in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26931/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, has provided total Exchequer funding of £14,592,032 for sports or partial sports facilities in the North Down constituency, in the last five years up to 31 March 2013 as detailed below.

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Total
2008/09	North Down Borough Council	Elite Facilities	380,970
2009/10	Ballyholme Yacht Club	Places for Sport	12,499
	Bangor Lawn Tennis Club	Awards For Sport	10,000
	Bangor Swimming Club	Awards For Sport	7,901
	Belfast Kayak Club	Awards For Sport	2,200
	Donaghadee Golf Club	Places for Sport	108,980
	Donaghadee Sailing Club	Awards For Sport	10,000
	North Down Borough Council	Elite Facilities	828,697
2010/11	1st Bangor Ladies FC	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	1,813
	North Down Borough Council	Elite Facilities	2,000,000
2011/12	North Down Borough Council	Elite Facilities	5,016,715
2012/13	North Down Borough Council	Elite Facilities	6,212,257
Grand Total			14,592,032

Department of Education

Holy Family Primary School, Omagh

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education to outline the timescale for the design and building of the new Holy Family Primary School, Omagh, that will cater for the pupils from the previous CBS Primary School in Brooke Street and the Loreto Primary School in Brookemount Road.

(AQW 26125/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The amalgamation of Loreto PS and St Colmcille's PS Omagh to form Holy Family PS was approved on 16 October 2006 and I officially opened the new school in December 2012.

To facilitate the amalgamation, a number of minor works were undertaken at both sites to the sum of £309,920. The work included replacement of a retaining wall on the Loreto site, refurbishment of toilets, replacement floor coverings and blinds within the schools.

If the precise nature of any further capital works required is determined, a bid should be made through the Minor Works or Schools Enhancement programmes.

At present, there are no plans for a new build project for Holy Family in Omagh.

Education and Skills Authority: Cost

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of the Education and Skills Authority to date, broken down by area of expenditure.

(AQW 26291/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) has not yet been established therefore it has incurred no cost. The member may be referring to the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT) and associated costs within my Department.

The total cost of expenditure from 2005 to 31 August 2013 is £16.535m. A table detailing the breakdown of expenditure is as shown below.

Total Cost of Establishing ESA - Breakdown of Expenditure April 2005 – August 2013

Type of Spend	05/06 £000	06/07 £000	07/08 £000	08/09 £000	09/10 £000	10/11 £000	11/12 £000	12/13 £000	13/14 (Apr to Aug 13) £000	Total £000
Salaries	99	762	1,382	2,142	2,528	1,886	1,559	1,667	860	12,885
Travel and Subsistence	2	8	10	61	44	35	24	19	12	215
Consultancy	0	327	143	161	218	15	0	22	0	886
Other Professional Fees	0	2	11	3	19	2	0	11	0	48
Research	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	15
Staff Training and Development	5	6	37	6	19	8	3	3	1	88
Hospitality	1	16	10	4	8	4	1	3	1	48
Other Office Services (i.e. postage, printing, telephony, stationery, photocopying leases and computer maintenance)	0	34	65	89	204	218	197	199	68	1,074
Advertisement and Publicity Costs	0	27	0	0	9	0	0	15	0	51
Translation Costs	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	1	7
Accommodation	0	0	127	117	212	166	122	125	49	918

Type of Spend	05/06 £000	06/07 £000	07/08 £000	08/09 £000	09/10 £000	10/11 £000	11/12 £000	12/13 £000	13/14 (Apr to Aug 13) £000	Total £000
Non cash charge in respect of services provided by other Departments	0	32	77	137	0	1	0	0	0	247
Mis/Other	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	9	0	11
Depreciation and Impairment	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	32	9	42
Total	107	1,214	1,864	2,720	3,277	2,335	1,907	2,110	1,001	16,535

The member's Party has been to the fore in blocking ESA and therefore must accept responsibility in the cost associated with the delay.

Special Educational Needs: Playgroups

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education why his Department does not fund special educational needs assistance for playgroups.
(AQW 26340/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An education and library board may fund special educational provision in non grant-aided institutions, such as playgroups, as long as it is satisfied that the interests of the child require such arrangements to be made and that the arrangements are compatible with the efficient use of resources.

Schools: Transport: Education and Library Board Assistance

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education how many A-level pupils in each Education and Library Board area are provided with transport assistance to their chosen school, when A-levels are available at a school within the statutory walking distance of their home.
(AQW 26690/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards determine whether a pupil is eligible for transport assistance using only two criteria: "distance" and "suitable school" as laid down within the Department's Home to School Transport Circular 1996/41 (as amended).

In line with the Circular, where there is A-Level provision at a suitable school within three miles of a pupil's home, transport assistance is not provided to a more distant school unless the pupil has applied to and been refused admission to all schools within three miles of their home. The Education and Library Boards have advised me that no exceptions are made to this policy and thus no pupils have been provided with transport assistance as outlined in the question.

Elluminate: Education and Library Boards

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25559/11-15, which Education and Library Boards are currently using Elluminate as part of their home tuition support services.
(AQW 26703/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) are the only Boards currently using Elluminate within their home tuition service.

Within BELB, all teachers in the Belfast Hospital School have received training in Elluminate and use it alongside the other Classroom 2000 (C2k) services to deliver a blended approach of face-to-face sessions and on-line learning for children who are ill. SELB have used Elluminate to support sick children at home on a pastoral level, helping them maintain contact with school and peers and allowing pupils to participate in some lessons. To-date, this use has mostly occurred within primary schools.

Free School Meals: Pupil Needs

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how the needs of pupils on free school meals will be protected in schools that have a low or moderate uptake of free school meals, should proposed changes to the Common Funding Formula be implemented.
(AQW 26713/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Free school meals (FSM) are available to pupils from non-working and low income households who meet the Department's free school meals eligibility criteria. The criteria are based mainly on receipt of certain benefits or Tax Credits: Income Support, Income based Jobseekers Allowance, Income related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

My proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme do not affect the Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) eligibility criteria. Therefore, pupils from schools with low or moderate FSME will continue to get their free school meal if they meet the eligibility criteria.

The Common Funding Formula uses registered entitlements to Free School Meals in determining funding distributions under the social deprivation element of the Targeting Social Need factor.

I have signalled my intention to apply the same eligibility criteria for free school meals for both primary and post-primary pupils from September 2014 which is expected to impact positively on around 15,000 post-primary pupils.

To ensure that other pupils (and schools) are not adversely impacted as a result of more FSME children in the system, part of the £30m which I announced for the ASB is to cover the increased pressures generated by these 15,000 pupils.

Schools: Renewable Energy

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has considered installing alternative renewable energy sources on school estates to reduce electricity and heating running costs for schools.

(AQW 26739/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is committed to the provision of modern sustainable accommodation for educational establishments and consideration is given to the use of renewable energy sources where economically feasible.

Studies are carried out for all new builds to establish if a suitable renewable energy source can be effectively utilised. The energy performance of existing buildings is monitored regularly and where deemed viable the installation of renewable technology is pursued.

Special Educational Needs: Transport in NEELB area

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education how many pupils with Special Educational Needs in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area require transport to school, broken down by district.

(AQW 26742/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the North Eastern Education and Library Board that the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs who require transport to school is as set out in the table below:

Council Area	Number of Pupils
Antrim	260
Ballymena	318
Ballymoney	132
Carrickfergus	159
Coleraine	307
Larne	116
Magherafelt	171
Moyle	51
Newtownabbey	350
Total	1,864

The figures include special educational pupils attending both special and mainstream schools.

Small Schools Subsidy

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact on the viability of rural schools of the suggested removal of the Small Schools Subsidy.

(AQW 26747/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: One of the recommendations in the Independent review of the Common Funding Scheme was to remove all small schools factors from the current funding. While I accepted this recommendation in principle, I decided not to implement it at this time. The small schools factors in the current formula will be retained for the 2014-15 financial year.

However, I want to see more progress on area planning and I will therefore reserve the capacity to make further adjustments to the funding formula in future years, including the removal of small schools factors, to reflect and respond to that progress in due course.

Dyscalculia

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what assistance his Department gives to children identified as having dyscalculia. (AQW 26772/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that there is a range of support for children identified as having dyscalculia including:-

- educational psychologists can provide advice to schools from stage two of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP);
- advice and training can also be provided by boards' support services to school staff, children and parents;
- If appropriate, direct support to children is provided on the basis of a Statement of Special Educational Needs at Stage Five of the COP;
- Advice and support can also be provided to schools by boards' Maths Advisers and through my department's Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project for underachieving pupils some of whom may have dyscalculia;
- If appropriate, examination concessions can also be applied at post-primary level.

Schools will also identify pupils with mathematical difficulties through all stages of the COP and deploy their own resources by way of relevant and purposeful measures.

Farming: Child Safety

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has undertaken, or plans to undertake, any projects with schools and farming communities to highlight to young children the risks associated with the farming environment. (AQW 26788/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not taken forward any projects with schools or farming communities in relation to the risks associated with the farming environment.

The revised curriculum is less prescriptive, with legislation setting out the minimum to be taught in our schools as Areas of Learning (AOLs) for each Key Stage. It provides more flexibility for teachers to make decisions on how best to interpret and combine minimum requirements to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils. The specifics of what is taught, and how it is taught, under each the Areas of Learning is therefore a matter for each teacher/school.

In line with this flexibility, the Department delegates as much funding and decision-making as possible to schools which are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils.

The Areas of Learning do provide teachers with the opportunity to cover this important issue, for example, through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) Area of Learning at primary level, pupils should be enabled to explore the importance of keeping healthy and how to keep safe in familiar and unfamiliar environments. Similar opportunities are provided at Post-Primary level through the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) Area of Learning.

Sure Start

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the success of the Sure Start programme. (AQW 26795/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sure Start Programme plays a vital role in ensuring that young children have a good start in life, through the delivery of a wide range of programmes and services to children aged under four and their parents living in the most disadvantaged areas. The ETI evaluation of the Sure Start developmental programme for 2-3 year olds in 2009/10 concluded that the programme had the potential to add value to pre-school provision and contribute positively to an integrated approach to meeting the needs of young children and their families.

There are now 35 Sure Start projects benefitting over 33,000 children and their families. My Department is investing £25m in 2013-14 in Sure Start, which represents a significant investment in this service.

The Learning to Learn strategy, which was published on 7th October 2013, sets out the way forward for early years education and learning services in line with education priorities. One of the key actions that will be taken forward will be a review of Sure Start, with input from DHSSPS, to assess the extent to which the programme is having the desired positive impact on the well-being and development of children and families in the most disadvantaged areas.

Sure Start: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education in which areas of North Down is the Sure Start programme operating. (AQW 26796/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The wards of Dufferin and Whitehill and the Super Output Areas (SOAs) of Conlig 3 and Harbour 1 will be served by the new Bangor Sure Start project.

At present Ards Sure Start provides the service delivery for Conlig 3 and Harbour 1. Responsibility for these areas will transfer to Bangor Sure Start once the project is established. I am advised that the Bangor Sure Start is on course to be fully operational in 2013/14.

Sure Start

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many people have taken part in the Sure Start programme to date.
(AQW 26797/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: DE delivers the Sure Start programme through the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), which has operational responsibility for the delivery of Sure Start. HSCB has recently developed and implemented a Sure Start database (Sure Start Play) funded by DE, to ensure effective monitoring of activity within Sure Start projects.

The database indicates that a total number of 33,360 children aged 0-4 years, and 37,101 adults are currently registered with Sure Start projects and therefore able to avail of services. Prior to establishment of the database, monitoring of Sure Start project activity was the responsibility of the former Health and Social Care Boards, prior to their transformation under RPA to the regional Health and Social Care Board. Information on how many people have taken part from the Programme's inception in 2000/01 until the establishment of the database is not held centrally by DE or the HSCB and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Common Funding Formula: Reduction in School Budgets

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what advice his Department has given to schools, that face a reduction in their budget under the Common Funding Formula, on how they can improve their educational performance.
(AQW 26807/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Indicative budgets for each grant-aided school were prepared as part of the current consultation process on the proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme. These budgets are for illustrative purposes only and reflect the delegated budget that individual schools would have received in this current financial year, if the proposed changes had been implemented.

My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals yet. It should be remembered that investment in schools is on the way up rather than on the way down. The aggregated schools' budget is set to increase by £15.8m next year, and I have already announced my intention to inject an additional £30m into it over the next two years, targeted at social deprivation.

Since coming to office I have continued to implement policies to raise standards and tackle educational underachievement. These policies include the school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum, entitlement framework, the framework for early years' education and learning, and the SEN and Inclusion Review.

These policies are realising improvements for all our young people. This is evidenced by improved outcomes at Key Stage 2, GCSE and A Level. However, despite these improvements, there still remains too large a gap in performance between pupils from socially disadvantaged areas and those from more affluent areas. More needs to be done to support pupils in areas of social deprivation. The key now is to step up the pace of implementation and delivery of these policies and to maintain the focus on raising standards to ensure that every pupil is able to achieve to their full potential.

Voluntary Grammar Sector: Non-teaching Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education for an update on the payment of due remits to non-teaching staff in the Voluntary Grammar Sector.
(AQW 26823/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have instructed officials to ensure that any outstanding £250 payments, for eligible staff in the Voluntary Grammar Sector earning less than £21,000 a year in 2010/11 and 2011/12, are made without unnecessary delay. Staff should receive the payments they are entitled to, as soon as the necessary approvals are in place.

Statementing: Southern Education and Library Board

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what is the average timeframe for the statementing for children in the Southern Education and Library Board.
(AQW 26826/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that the average timeframe for statementing children, for the period October 2012 to September 2013, excluding valid exceptions, is 21.75 weeks.

Christian Brothers Grammar School, Omagh

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to involve professional mediators from the Labour Relations Agency to address the serious issues between management and staff at Omagh Christian Brothers' Grammar School, as identified in the recent Education and Training Inspectorate report.

(AQW 26839/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As indicated previously, my Department is working with Omagh Christian Brothers' Grammar School and the Western Education & Library Board to put in place a suitable mediation arrangement designed to help the Board of Governors address outstanding issues and build a culture of trust and mutual support throughout the school community. The precise nature of those arrangements is the subject of continuing discussion between the Department, the WELB and the school.

Looked-after Children: Personal Education Plans

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education why he was unaware that looked-after children should have had personal education plans in place by June 2013.

(AQW 26854/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I assume the member's question refers to his recent question during Topical Questions and my reply. I have since corrected the record on this matter and apologise for any misunderstanding.

All looked-after children do require Personal Education Plans (PEPs). These are initiated by the child's social worker and schools complete them when asked to do so. The Health and Social Care Board's timetable for progressing PEPs indicated that all looked-after children and young people would have a PEP in place by 1 June 2013. This has not been achieved. My Department officials are working with other partners including DHSSPS, the Health and Social Board, Trusts and Education and Library Boards to address this issue.

Statementing: South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the average time for statementing in the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 26859/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the average timeframe for statementing children, for the period October 2012 to September 2013, excluding valid exceptions, is 24 weeks.

Statementing: Education and Library Boards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in each Education and Library Board have been statemented in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils who have had a statement of special educational needs issued in the last three academic years is as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
BELB	401	416	366
NEELB	358	420	402
SEELB	483	326	440
SELB	326	393	449
WELB	267	372	357

Recruitment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of people (a) applying for; and (b) appointed to, temporary and permanent posts in his Department in each of the last two years, broken down by community background.

(AQW 26875/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The NICS produces an Annual Report on Recruitment each year which is in the public domain. It provides a summary on recruitment in all NICS Departments, including the Department of Education (DE). The most recent data available is for the period 1 January 2012 until 31 December 2012. The report includes summary data and analysis of recruitment provided by the Northern Ireland research and Statistics Agency (NISRA). It can be accessed at:

<https://irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net/pages/content.aspx?Page=annual-reports>

Reports for previous years can also be accessed using the same link.

The majority of external recruitment to DE is carried out by volume, corporate led competitions, whereby individuals apply to join the NICS rather than rather than specific departments. Data relating to applicants and appointees to permanent DE posts as a result of 5 DE led competitions held in 2011 and 2012, is set out in the tables below. The year refers to the year of application and not the year of appointment. There were no DE led competitions for temporary posts with a closing date for applications in 2011 or 2012.

Applicants to DE led competitions

For 2012, due to small numbers of applicants (ie less than 5) in the Not Determined category, this category has been combined with the Protestant category.

	2011			2012	
	No.	%		No.	%
Protestant	9	34.6%	Protestant/Not Determined	24	25.8%
Catholic	17	65.4%	Catholic	69	74.2%
Not Determined	0	0.0%			

Appointments from DE led competitions held in 2011 and 2012

To protect the confidentiality of the community background of appointees, in 2011 and 2012, this information has been suppressed. Data re appointments is as at 26 September 2013.

	2011 No.	2012 No.
Total	2	4

Education Other than at School

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to list the number of Education Other Than At School facilities in each Education and Library Board area; and the year in which they were opened.

(AQW 26897/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A list of Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) Centres in each Education and Library Board (ELB) area and the year they were opened is included below.

Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)

Centre	Year Opened
Glenmona Resource Centre, Glen Road, Belfast BT11 8BX	1999
Iveagh Centre, 67 Broadway, Belfast BT12 6HF	2012
Loughshore Education Resource Centre, 889 Shore Road, Belfast BT36 7DH	2001
The Link Centre, SPSS, 8 – 30 Barrack Street, Belfast BT12 4AH	2000 1999
TOPS, (Staffed by The Belfast Hospital School which opened in 1990), 8 – 30 Barrack Street Belfast BT12 4AH	2010
Newstart Education Centre, 1a Dunlewey Street, Belfast BT13 2QU (Community Based)	1998
Conway Education Centre, 5 – 7 Conway Street, Belfast BT13 2DE (Community Based)	1983
Pathways, Unit 5 Nelson Trade Centre, Nelson Street, Belfast BT15 1BH	1998
Pathways, 141 – 149 York Street, Belfast BT15 1 AB	1998
Pathways, 331 Shankill Road, Belfast BT13 2AA (Community Based)	1998

South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)

Centre	Year Opened
Beechcroft Education Unit, 110 Saintfield Road, Belfast BT8 6HD	2010
Castlereagh AEP, 56 Merok Park, Belfast BT6 9LT	2002

Centre	Year Opened
Downpatrick AEP, Ardmore, 95a Saul Road BT30 6NJ	2000
Groomsport Intensive Support Learning Unit, Springwell Drive, Groomsport, BT19 6JX	2007
Redburn, 364 Old Holywood Road, Holywood, BT18 9QW Previously at Victoria Road, Bangor from 2004	2008
Lagan Valley AEP, 4a ColinGreen (in partnership with SELB since 2004), Poleglass Dunmurray Belfast, BT17 0PQ (Community Provider)	1994

North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB)

Centre	Year Opened
Ballymena EOTAS, Braid Primary School, 187 Carnlough Road, Broughshane BT43 7JW	2012
Carrick/Larne EOTAS, Greenisland Youth Centre, 15c Glassillan Grove, Greenisland BT38 8TE	2007
Coleraine EOTAS, Drumard Primary School, 70 Tamlaght Road, Tamlaght O'Crilly, Upperlands Maghera, BT46 5XB	2013
Leagreen Primary Referral Unit, Glenvarna Drive, Glengormley BT35 5JB	2003
Newtownabbey Educational, Guidance Centre, 231 Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey BT37 0LR	1990
Rathmore Educational Guidance Centre, 10 Loughanmore Road, Dunadry BT41 2HQ	1990
Sunlea Educational Guidance Centre, 180 Ballycastle Road, Coleraine BT52 2EG	1982

Southern Education and Library Board (SELB)

Centre	Year Opened
The Kinnego Centre, 56 Lislasly Road, Kinnego, Dungannon BT71 6TB	1995
Lough Road Primary Pupil Referral Unit, Lough Road Key Stage 2 Provision Lough Road Key Stage 3 Provision* Lough Road Key Stage 4 Provision 27 Lough Road, Lurgan BT66 6JJ *KS3 provision transferred to Tamnamore LC in 2013	2002 2006 2004 2002
Newry KS4 EOTAS, 61 Dominic Street, Newry, BT35 8BW Tamnamore Learning Centre 2009 151 Tamnamore Road Dungannon BT81 6HW	2004 Closed in 2013 for KS4 Re-opened September 2013 for KS3

Western Education and Library Board (WELB)

Centre	Year Opened
Laurel Centre (KS3) Laurel Centre (KS4), Maydown House, 1 Maydown Road, L' Derry BT47 6UF	2002 2002
EOTAS Enniskillen, Shanmullagh Support Unit, Ballinamallard BT94 2LY	2004
EOTAS Limavady, LEAP Support Unit, Limavady BT49 9ET	2004
EOTAS Strabane, Knockavoe Support Unit, Strabane BT82 9EB	2004
Longtower Youth and Community Centre, Anne Street, L'Derry BT48 6PB	2002

Teachers: Pensions

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the discrepancies identified in membership data for the purposes of the 2012/13 Teachers' Superannuation Annual Scheme Statements; (ii) when these discrepancies were first identified; and (iii) what action has been taken to address this issue.

(AQW 26902/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The discrepancies identified in membership data for the purposes of the 2012/13 Teachers' Superannuation Annual Scheme Statements arise from reconciliation of membership statistics at 31 December 2012 to those at 31 March 2013. This shows a decrease (1556) in active members, offset by a similar increase (1506) in deferred members.
- (ii) These discrepancies were identified earlier this year during preparation of the 2012/13 Teachers' Superannuation Annual Scheme Statements published on 5 July.
- (iii) The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) concluded that any potential misstatement on the pension liability, arising from these discrepancies, does not have a material impact on the 2012-13 resource accounts. However the Department fully recognises the importance of the accuracy of membership data and is currently implementing a plan of actions developed from NIAO advice on this issue.

Schools: Leaving Age

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what consideration his Department has given to raising the school leaving age to 18 years old, similar to recent legislative changes in Great Britain.

(AQW 26904/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Compulsory school age in Northern Ireland is where pupils, who are 16 between 1 September and 1 July (inclusive) in the school year, can leave school on 30 June of that year. Pupils, who become 16 between 2 July and 31 August (inclusive) in any year, cannot leave school until 30 June of the following year.

I have currently no plans to change the school leaving age.

Shared Education

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21991/11-15, to clarify what is meant by 'education together of learners from all Section 75 and socio-economic status'.

(AQW 26905/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education sought responses from stakeholders on how the advancement of shared education meet the needs of, and provide for the education together, of learners from all Section 75 categories and all socio-economic backgrounds.

The three key themes that tended to emerge were:

- shared education as a way of schools supporting each other and sharing expertise;
- greater coordination of school development plans and resources; and
- the inclusion of special schools in collaborative networks.

I intend to make a statement to the Assembly in the near future on recommendations made by Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education. In my statement I will also outline how shared education can be advanced in ways that ensure equality of opportunity and access to education for all learners.

Educational Psychologists

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many educational psychologists are employed in each Education and Library Board.

(AQW 26930/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of educational psychologists employed in each Education and Library Board (Full Time Equivalents) are listed below:

SEELB	34.4
SELB	26.9
WELB	22.5
BELB	28.1
NEELB	25.92

Special Educational Needs

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 26953/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 strengthened the right to an ordinary education place for children or young people with special educational needs (SEN) and extended similar provisions to those contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to educational institutions in the north of Ireland. Not every pupil

with a disability will have SEN but, where a disability prevents the pupil from accessing education then provision for the pupil may be considered through the medium of a statement of special education needs.

With the introduction of SENDO it is unlawful for a “responsible body” to discriminate against pupils or prospective pupils in;

- the arrangements a school makes for determining admission to the school;
- the terms in which the school offers to admit a child;
- a refusal by the school to admit a child or by deliberately omitting the child’s application
- discrimination by the school in the education or associated services provided for or offered to pupils at the school;
- discrimination by the school by suspending or expelling the child.

“Responsible body” means;

- in the case of a grant-aided school the Board of Governors of the school or the Education and Library Board for the area in which the school is situated, according to which has the function in question; or in relation to an independent school, the proprietor.

Part B of the Department’s Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission sets out action measures carried out in relation to the implementation of disability duties. The most recent Annual Progress Report can be found on the Equality Scheme page of the Department’s website.

Copies of the Annual Progress Report have also been placed in the Assembly Library.

In the near future, there will be a consultation on the Department’s proposed Disability Action Plan for 2013-15 and the Five Year Review of Disability Action Plans. This will provide additional opportunities to engage with, and be challenged by, individuals with disabilities and organisations representing persons with disabilities.

Statementing: Southern Education and Library Board

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether there is a limit on how many children can be statemented per term, or per academic year, in the Southern Education and Library Board area, and if so, if there flexibility is on the basis of need. (AQW 27007/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has confirmed that there is no limit on how many children can be statemented per term or academic year.

Statementing: Primary Schools

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether he will place a duty on Education and Library Boards to hold reserve funding to meet the medical needs of primary school pupils whilst they await a Statement of Special Educational Needs. (AQW 27044/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: I do not believe that it would be appropriate to place a duty on Education and Library Boards to hold reserve funding to meet the medical needs of primary school pupils whilst they await a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

This is due to the precise nature of support required for each child, as contained in a Statement, only being able to be finalised following full consideration of each child’s individual special educational needs involving close co-operation between all agencies concerned, including health professionals, and subsequent consultation with the child’s parents.

Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on a new and permanent building for Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne following his announcement on 22 January 2013. (AQW 27057/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: Corran Integrated Primary School was included in my capital investment statement of 22 January 2013 as one of 22 primary and post-primary schools which will be advanced in planning.

The project is still at an early stage of the planning process and my officials are currently considering all options regarding the appointment of consultants for those projects included in the January 2013 announcement.

Until this work has been concluded and outcomes agreed no further planning on the Corran Integrated Primary School project can proceed. It is hoped that this matter will be resolved shortly. Officials will engage with the school authorities in the coming weeks to advance the appointment of the required professional consultants.

Relationship and Sex Education

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the evaluation and due diligence procedures in place with regards to the materials permitted in Relationship and Sex Education (RSE); and (ii) to what extent the organisation “Precious Life” or any of their affiliated organisations are involved in the schooling system with regards to Relationship and Sex Education. (AQW 27078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education delegates as much funding and decision-making as possible to schools which are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils and we take the view that it is very much a matter for schools themselves to decide on the resources they wish to use in their delivery across all subjects within the curriculum – the Department of Education does not prescribe the resources to be used.

The Department does provide advice and guidance about Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) for schools and this guidance requires schools to have in place its own policy on how it will address the delivery of RSE. A school's policy should be subject to consultation with parents, and should be endorsed by a school's Board of Governors. It must also be delivered in a sensitive manner which is appropriate to the age and understanding of pupils and to the ethos of the school.

With regards to the use of external programme providers, it is a matter for each school to reach a judgement on whether or not a resource provided by an external body might enhance their teaching and learning. Accordingly, the Department does not endorse, promote or recommend such resources or programmes and we do not hold information about the use of such organisations by schools.

Department for Employment and Learning

South West College: Beacon Centre

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25524/11-15, why South West Regional College delivered provision for young people leaving special schools through the Beacon Centre, which predominately deals with mental health issues.

(AQW 26594/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): South West College (SWC) does not deliver provision to young people leaving special schools through the Beacon Centres.

As I stated in AQW 25524/11-15, during the 2012/13 academic year, SWC provided part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the Dungannon campus, in conjunction with the Beacon Centre. SWC considered that this type of provision was not appropriate for young adults leaving special schools.

South West College: Consultation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25524/11-15, for an assurance that the consultation process will be conducted by South West Regional College with the relevant parties in future.

(AQW 26671/11-15)

Dr Farry: South West Regional College have informed me that the College has worked to develop strong links with the local special schools, together with other professional staff, related to the field of special educational needs.

The College assure me that they are in communication with all key stakeholders, on an ongoing basis. On this basis, I am content that they already include all relevant parties in their consultation process and have no doubt that this will continue to be the case.

South West College: Learning Disability

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the audit that was completed by his Department on learning disability provision at South West College will be published; and to outline the reasons for the delay in publication.

(AQW 26901/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have shared the findings of the audit of further education provision for adults with learning disabilities, in South West College, with Lord Morrow and the Committee for Employment and Learning, as agreed.

The audit was conducted by my Department to determine the availability of provision and is available to those who require it.

Management and Leadership Development Programme: South Down

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the Management and Leadership Development programme initiatives in the South Down Constituency.

(AQW 26903/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department offers a range of leadership and management interventions across Northern Ireland, which aim to improve the skills of both companies and individual managers. A total of 29 different initiatives are comprised in the Management Analysis and Planning (MAP) programme, the Management and Leadership Development Programme (MLDP) and the INTRO Graduate management development programme. Since April 2013 leadership and management programmes have been fully funded for interested companies and participants.

Over the three years to date in the South Down constituency area 18 companies have taken up the MAP programme; 41 individual managers have participated in MLDP; and; 13 graduates have participated on the INTRO Graduate Management

Development programme. Two focused leadership and management roadshow events were held in Newry, providing details of available leadership and management support as well as providing a leadership themed talk by a leading UK expert.

Queen's University: Tuition Fees

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has given any consideration to; (i) increasing university tuition fees beyond £3500; and (ii) the appeal by the new Vice Chancellor of Queens University to lift the cap on tuition fees. (AQW 26976/11-15)

Dr Farry: As you are aware, on 27 June 2011 the Executive agreed to cap tuition fees for Northern Ireland domiciles studying in Northern Ireland at £3,465, subject only to annual inflationary increases. Presently, my Department is committed to maintaining the current Executive policy of freezing tuition fees at their current levels.

Ultimately, I remain fully committed to ensuring that our universities continue to be able to compete with universities throughout the rest of the United Kingdom and indeed globally. Thus, while tuition fees remain capped in Northern Ireland, my Department has continued in its role as the primary funder of the sector. This is in stark contrast to the rest of the United Kingdom, where, although the universities now receive a higher proportion of their incomes through annual tuition fee payments, direct government funding has substantially decreased.

Youth Employment Scheme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the success rate of the Youth Employment Scheme broken down by constituency. (AQW 26993/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information in relation to the Youth Employment Scheme is outlined in the attached table. This information is collated on a local office rather than constituency basis and reflects the position from the launch of the scheme until 4 October 2013.

Constituency	Served by Offices	Employer Agreements Signed	Opportunities Available	Young People taking up Placement	Young People Securing Employment
North Antrim	Ballymena Ballymoney	156	230	116	46
South Antrim	Antrim Newtownabbey	123	197	88	25
East Antrim	Larne Carrickfergus	112	146	79	20
East L'Derry	Coleraine Limavady	266	315	200	64
Foyle	Foyle Lisnagelvin	682	761	437	126
West Tyrone	Strabane Omagh	118	137	100	54
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Enniskillen Dungannon	158	209	106	75
Mid Ulster	Magherafelt Cookstown	99	128	71	37
Newry & Armagh	Newry Armagh	128	314	97	33
Upper Bann	Lurgan Portadown Banbridge	282	427	222	78
South Down	Kilkeel Newcastle Downpatrick	144	190	75	15
Lagan Valley	Lisburn Ballynahinch	125	209	105	37
Strangford	Newtownards	56	102	50	23

Constituency	Served by Offices	Employer Agreements Signed	Opportunities Available	Young People taking up Placement	Young People Securing Employment
North Down	Bangor	89	107	68	28
Belfast North	North Belfast	38	112	34	10
Belfast East	Hollywood Road	41	99	50	13
Belfast South	Knockbreda Shaftesbury Square	123	333	88	24
Belfast West	Falls Andersonstown Shankill	94	370	194	21
Total		2834	4386	2180	729

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband: Improvement Project

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 25734/11-15, when the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project will be operational.

(AQW 26338/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project began procurement on 2 October 2013 and responses to the tender are to be submitted by 6 November. The time at which the project will become operational will be dependent on the tender response from the market. The target for completion is March 2015.

Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment where the annual Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator for Northern Ireland Compliance Plans are publicly available.

(AQW 26399/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Handling of the Compliance Plans is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, not my Department.

I refer also to my response to AQW 26316/11-15.

Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what formal reporting structures exist from the Utility Regulator to her Department on whether Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator for Northern Ireland are compliant with their licences.

(AQW 26400/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Compliance with licence requirements is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what process is in place to address non-compliance in respect of Northern Ireland Electricity or System Operator for Northern Ireland's licence obligations.

(AQW 26407/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Compliance, or otherwise, with licence conditions is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

Non-compliances Reported

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many non-compliances have been reported (i) before Northern Ireland Electricity was sold to ESB; and (ii) following the sale.

(AQW 26408/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Monitoring of compliance with licence conditions is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

System Operator for Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many non-compliances have been reported (i) before System Operator for Northern Ireland was sold to EIRGRID; and (ii) following the sale.

(AQW 26409/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Monitoring of compliance with licence conditions is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to whom the Utility Regulator is accountable, in terms of ensuring adequate monitoring of Northern Ireland Electricity or System Operator for Northern Ireland compliance plans or licence obligations.

(AQW 26473/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation is a non-Ministerial Government Department accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Electricity: Price Rise

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the reasons for the eighteen percent price rise for electricity consumers in Northern Ireland, but not in the Republic of Ireland, despite both being a part of the same electricity market.

(AQW 26475/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Regulator has advised that whilst Power NI, the regulated electricity supplier in Northern Ireland, does purchase wholesale energy from the same pool market as suppliers in the Republic of Ireland, the network and supply and tax elements of the final price paid by customers will be different. These non-wholesale elements make up around 45% of the final price.

The Regulator has further advised that despite the recent 17.8% increase, the Power NI standard tariff is today still cheaper than the Electric Ireland standard tariff. Electric Ireland is the main supplier in the Republic of Ireland.

Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department has continued to (i) monitor the importance of securing existing jobs; and (ii) maintaining the identity of the electricity network business in Northern Ireland; and whether this is still valid given the changes within Northern Ireland Electricity and the System Operator of Northern Ireland, following their sale to the Irish state owned companies, ESB and Eirgrid.

(AQW 26483/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As per my response to AQW 26317/11-15, licence conditions require that the businesses have adequate financial and non-financial resources to conduct their operations. As per my response to AQW 25202/11-15, identity is a matter for the company.

Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of how Northern Ireland Electricity and System Operator for Northern Ireland are complying with their licences, in particular, how each have remained fully independent to ESB and Eirgrid by providing the premises, systems, equipment, facilities, property, personnel, data and management resources that are necessary for its efficient and effective managerial and operational independence.

(AQW 26484/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Monitoring of compliance with licence requirements is a matter for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

System Operator for Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as the independent Transmission System Operator Business for Northern Ireland, for her assessment of whether the System Operator for Northern Ireland should be totally independent from the equivalent Transmission System Operator Business for the Republic of Ireland, notwithstanding any normal co-operation between Transmission System Operator Businesses of neighbouring countries.

(AQW 26490/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am not the Independent Transmission System Operator Business for Northern Ireland.

Exploris

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department can take to allow the Exploris Aquarium to remain open.

(AQW 26683/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 26535/11-15.

Allstate Northern Ireland

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Allstate Northern Ireland intends to announce redundancies in the North West.

(AQW 26822/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Allstate Northern Ireland is not intending to announce any redundancies in its North West office.

In fact I recently approved a package of assistance totalling £4.9million to support the creation of 650 new technology, knowledge and business process outsourcing positions across Allstate's 3 sites in Northern Ireland with scope to create up to 200 in the North West region – skills availability and business demand permitting.

Mobile Network Coverage

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will make direct contact with mobile phone companies to address the network coverage problems over the last number of weeks.

(AQW 26827/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The mobile phone companies are private sector organisations, independently regulated and, to date, have not been supported with public investment from my Department. As such there is no obligation on those companies to report any network outage issues to my Department.

Nevertheless, DETI officials have contacted the four main operators to ascertain if they have been experiencing any significant network problems in recent weeks particularly in the South Down constituency. They have been advised that while some have reported localised issues related to loss of power or temporary site shutdown due to ongoing network upgrades, for the majority there have been no widespread outages. It is understood that on those localised occasions disruption is being kept to a minimum.

If consumers are experiencing issues with their network services, these should be reported directly to the service provider in the first instance. All mobile phone companies have coverage checkers on their websites to enable consumers to check signal strength in their areas. Indeed some post details of areas where unexpected problems are being experienced or planned maintenance is scheduled, together with an indication of possible time to resolution/completion.

Mobile Infrastructure Project

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the roll out of the Mobile Infrastructure Project which is being administered by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

(AQW 26828/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The contract for the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) is being fully administered, resourced and managed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. DETI therefore has no direct involvement in its implementation.

DCMS does however keep DETI informed of progress on an ad hoc basis. The latest update was received at a telecoms meeting of the Devolved Administrations in Belfast on 13 September. At that meeting it was reported that the project was progressing well generally and that in the Northern Ireland context there had been good local engagement as the contractor, Arqiva, conducted its site planning analysis.

Arqiva has been conducting site analysis in one of the first areas of Northern Ireland to be addressed by the project i.e. Newry & Mourne and has been meeting with local elected representatives and others in this regard. Arqiva has also been in contact with the DoE Planning Service to unlock potential planning issues and with bodies such as Northern Ireland Water and the Forestry Commission around potential land use.

More details on the project in general can be found on the DCMS website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-it-easier-for-the-communications-and-telecoms-industries-to-grow-while-protecting-the-interests-of-citizens/activity>.

Mobile Infrastructure Project

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether South Down will have improved network coverage as a result of the Mobile Infrastructure Project.

(AQW 26829/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) is administered and resourced directly by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in London and delivered through a contract with communications infrastructure and media services company Arqiva.

In July 2013 DCMS and Arqiva published a map setting out the local authority areas that stand to benefit from MIP investment with an indication that Arqiva had begun the process of identifying suitable sites for mast infrastructure in a phased manner. The map, which also provides an outline of the project phasing across the UK, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mobile-reception-around-uk-to-get-massive-boost>.

It is my understanding that South Down is currently one of the areas standing to benefit from the extended mobile coverage that the MIP will bring about.

Mobile Infrastructure Project

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department plans to address potential network problems during the roll out of the Mobile Infrastructure Project.

(AQW 26830/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As per my response to AQW 26829/11-15, the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) is administered and resourced directly by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in London. My Department does not therefore have any direct involvement in the project implementation.

Under the project, DCMS is providing capital funding to its contractor, Arqiva, to build the new site infrastructure, while mobile network operators EE, Telefonica (O2), Three and Vodafone will be providing coverage from the sites and funding their operating costs for the 20-year life of the project.

DCMS has advised my officials that at this stage, it is not envisaged there will be any network disruptions associated with the roll out of the MIP.

Home Heating Oil

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the total percentage increase in home heating oil prices since 2007.

(AQW 26832/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not hold data on the cost of home heating oil but does track information collated from a selection of local distributors by the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, which has published data since 2009 covering the price range of 300, 500 and 900 litre fills.

This information can be obtained through the following link: www.consumercouncil.org.uk/oil-price-watch/

Gas Storage: Islandmagee

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the decision of the UK Government to end subsidies for gas storage facilities has an impact on the proposed facility in Islandmagee.

(AQW 26886/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Islandmagee gas storage project has been developed as a commercial venture without any expectation of government subsidy. The developers of the project are continuing to work towards obtaining the necessary consents and regulatory arrangements for the project.

Gas Storage: Islandmagee

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the proposed gas storage facility in Islandmagee.

(AQW 26887/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland is totally dependent on imported natural gas for power generation, business and domestic use. A gas storage facility, such as that proposed at Islandmagee, would enhance our security of supply in the event of a disruption to gas supplies and provide an additional gas resource at times of peak demand. A gas storage facility could also help consumers to avoid price spikes at times of high gas demand.

Exports to EU

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how she supports businesses that wish to export to other countries within the European Union.

(AQO 4816/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides a range of export trade solutions that are available to any Northern Ireland-based manufacturing or tradable service company wishing to sell outside Northern Ireland.

The current Overseas Events Programme includes over 40 missions and exhibitions in European countries.

To assist businesses develop these markets, Invest NI has representation across Europe, with offices in Brussels, Dublin, Dusseldorf and London and trade advisors based in the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Russia, Turkey and the Scandinavian countries.

Broadband

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Further Consultation on the Provision of Basic and Superfast Broadband Services.

(AQO 4812/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Responses to the further consultation were received from 156 individuals and 13 organisations highlighting nearly 700 postcodes where it was felt broadband was not available.

After removing duplicates and seeking clarification from the telecoms industry, my Department decided that 138 postcodes should be added where a basic broadband service of 2 Mega bits per second was not currently available and 85 postcodes added to the list of postcodes where superfast services are not available.

I am pleased to announce that procurement has commenced and an Invitation to Tender was issued on the 2 October 2013.

Job Creation: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what potential job creation opportunities have been identified for East Londonderry in the last 18 months.

(AQO 4817/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the last 18 months, Invest NI has made offers of assistance to companies in East Londonderry valued at £4.6 million, leading to total investment in the constituency of nearly £23 million and promoting almost 300 new jobs.

In addition, the Jobs Fund, which aims to help boost employment creation in the shorter-term, remains ongoing and in East Londonderry there are currently 17 projects at varying stages of development which have the potential to deliver a further 80 new jobs.

The Jobs Fund has also provided support to 18 young people not in Education, Employment or Training to set up their own businesses in the constituency and 14 other new business starts in the constituency's Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

In June of this year I also met with members of the Roe Valley Chamber of Trade and Limavady Borough Council to discuss a wide range of economic development issues in the area. You can be assured that my Department and Invest NI continue to do all we can to identify new projects that will lead to further job creation in the constituency.

Manufacturing

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the outcomes from activities undertaken by InvestNI and InterTradelreland to facilitate island-wide networks to support the development of local manufacturing.

(AQO 4819/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI and InterTradelreland both work on a collaborative and individual basis to facilitate networks that support the development of local manufacturing.

Invest NI has supported InterTradelreland's Acumen programme, helping support 43 Northern Ireland businesses and providing over £300,000 of financial assistance. Invest NI in association with Bord Bia and Scottish Food and Drink have been instrumental in helping to create a new cross border business network 'Access 6' in the promotion of SME food and drink processors in external markets.

In 2012, InterTradelreland's Fusion Programme reported a business development impact of £31.2 million and 101 jobs, while its Innova programme reported a business impact of £23.7 million and 31 jobs. InterTradelreland's FP7/Horizon 2020 programme has now realized a drawdown valued at €80.55 million distributed among 89 successful projects in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Giro d'Italia 2014

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the criteria used when establishing the provisional route for the Giro d'Italia 2014.

(AQO 4820/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would like to confirm that I did not choose the route for The Grand Partenza of The Giro d'Italia 2014. RCS Sport, the event owners, chose the route based on a number of conditions primarily around sporting criteria.

They take into account the roads, the flow of the stage and how this will affect the racing. RCS Sport has also considered the television images that will showcase Northern Ireland.

You will understand that there are many areas of the country that are not included and it would be impossible for the event to go through every area of Northern Ireland.

A lot of work has gone into getting these stages right from a Giro d'Italia point of view. When an event comes this far away from its home base we must take care to look after their interests and ensure the central sporting considerations of the race are met.

Electricity: Security of Supply

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the ongoing work to ensure sufficient electricity supply post 2016.

(AQO 4821/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am not concerned about security of electricity supply in the short term as the 2013 Generation Capacity Statement notes that a generation surplus in Northern Ireland will remain for several years from 2016. Additionally, the island will have a generation surplus for the next decade.

My officials have been engaging with the Utility Regulator and the system operator SONI to consider how best to maintain an appropriate generation capacity margin until the new North-South electricity link is in place. Also, I have encouraged Mutual Energy to restore the Moyle electricity link with Great Britain to its full capacity as soon as possible.

Renewable Energy

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on progress towards achieving her Department's Programme for Government 11/15 target to encourage 20 per cent of electricity consumption from renewable sources and 4 per cent renewable heat by 2015.

(AQO 4822/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As of end August 2013, the annual average percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources was 14.9% and we are on track to meet the Programme for Government target of 20% by 2015.

The collection of up to date data on renewable heat demand is less straightforward as there is no centralised heat network that can be monitored.

Initial uptake of the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive and Renewable Heat Premium Payment suggests that we are in line to meet the 4% milestone in 2015.

Department of the Environment

Recycling

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the recycling figures in each council area.

(AQW 26369/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): The latest annual validated figures for waste sent for recycling available are for 2011/12, however, provisional estimates for 2012/13 are also available but these are subject to further revision until they are fully validated and published in late November 2013.

Waste Group	Council Area	KPI (a)	KPI (e)
		Household Waste ¹ sent for recycling and composting – 2011/12 validated figures	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste ² sent for recycling and composting – 2011/12 validated figures
arc 21	Antrim	49.3%	53.2%
	Ards	41.2%	38.2%
	Ballymena	38.0%	38.3%
	Belfast	31.7%	26.9%
	Carrickfergus	40.9%	46.1%
	Castlereagh	42.2%	42.3%
	Down	33.0%	31.0%
	Larne	50.8%	53.0%
	Lisburn	40.5%	40.0%
	Newtownabbey	43.4%	40.6%
	North Down	45.0%	44.3%

Waste Group	Council Area	KPI (a)	KPI (e)
		Household Waste ¹ sent for recycling and composting – 2011/12 validated figures	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste ² sent for recycling and composting – 2011/12 validated figures
NWRWMG	Ballymoney	36.2%	35.2%
	Coleraine	39.8%	37.8%
	Derry	28.8%	29.8%
	Limavady	36.4%	36.6%
	Magherafelt	60.2%	59.1%
	Moyle	41.2%	38.5%
	Strabane	33.6%	31.7%
SWaMP 2008	Armagh	42.4%	43.4%
	Banbridge	52.0%	53.3%
	Cookstown	41.0%	41.1%
	Craigavon	43.5%	41.0%
	Dungannon	41.6%	39.2%
	Fermanagh	35.4%	37.0%
	Newry & Mourne	37.1%	32.5%
	Omagh	43.4%	42.8%

Waste Group	Council Area	KPI (a)	KPI (e)
		Household Waste ¹ sent for recycling and composting – 2012/13 provisional estimates	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste ² sent for recycling and composting – 2012/13 provisional estimates
arc 21	Antrim	49.2%	53.6%
	Ards	37.7%	35.6%
	Ballymena	44.1%	44.2%
	Belfast	34.1%	29.7%
	Carrickfergus	39.4%	41.5%
	Castlereagh	40.7%	40.9%
	Down	33.5%	32.0%
	Larne	50.1%	52.9%
	Lisburn	40.1%	39.8%
	Newtownabbey	45.7%	43.2%
	North Down	43.6%	43.9%
NWRWMG	Ballymoney	33.9%	33.3%
	Coleraine	41.4%	38.7%
	Derry	27.3%	28.3%
	Limavady	38.3%	42.0%
	Magherafelt	56.7%	56.0%
	Moyle	40.8%	38.5%
	Strabane	32.5%	30.0%

Waste Group	Council Area	KPI (a)	KPI (e)
		Household Waste ¹ sent for recycling and composting – 2012/13 provisional estimates	Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste ² sent for recycling and composting – 2012/13 provisional estimates
SWaMP 2008	Armagh	40.6%	41.0%
	Banbridge	53.8%	55.7%
	Cookstown	41.4%	41.6%
	Craigavon	46.1%	45.3%
	Dungannon	42.4%	40.5%
	Fermanagh	34.8%	37.0%
	Newry & Mourne	37.2%	33.1%
	Omagh	43.2%	42.6%

Notes:

- Household waste includes materials collected directly from households (kerbside collections) or taken to bring sites, civic amenity sites or collected by private and voluntary organisations not included elsewhere.
- Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste is waste under the control or possession of a district council including non household sources.

NIEA collates recycling information from local councils on the WasteDataFlow database, and further information on recycling figures and waste arisings can be found at: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/waste-home/municipal_data_reporting.htm

Planning Conditions: Breaches

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how many cases of a breach of planning conditions his Department has dealt with in each of the last four years; and how many of these were referred to the Planning Appeals Commission.

(AQW 26387/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Table 1 below provides figures for alleged breaches of planning conditions from April 2009 to March 2013.

	April 2009 - March 2010	April 2010 - March 2011	April 2011 - March 2012	April 2012 - March 2013
No of cases opened for alleged breach of planning condition	645	526	393	444

The figures in Table 1 reflect the number of cases that were opened in each year for alleged breaches of planning control that the Department has dealt with. Not all of these cases would result in a Breach of Condition Notice being served.

When a Breach of Condition Notice is served, there is no right of appeal against such. Therefore none were referred to the Planning Appeals Commission.

Planning Conditions: Breaches

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment, in cases of a breach of planning conditions, what guidance his Department issues to Strategic Planning on the number of warning letters that are sent to the alleged offender before a summons is issued.

(AQW 26388/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Enforcement Manual provides guidance to planning staff on the implementation of 'Planning Policy Statement 9: The Enforcement of Planning Control'. This guidance sets out the procedures to be followed when investigating possible breaches of planning control including a breach of a planning condition.

Staff will be aware through this guidance that where a breach of planning control has been established, the Department may attempt to remedy it by issuing a warning letter. The warning letter will advise the recipient of the breach, what needs to be done to remedy it and how much time they have to carry out what needs to be done. This gives the recipient the opportunity to either rectify the breach or contact the Department and explain how the unauthorised development has occurred. If there is no reasonable prospect of the situation being resolved through negotiation the Department may move directly to formal action.

In cases of a breach of planning condition, no specific guidance has been issued to planning staff regarding the number of warning letters that can be sent to an alleged offender before a summons is issued as each breach of a planning condition is considered on a case by case basis.

It is important to note that the Department has a general discretion on whether to take enforcement action against a breach of planning control. It does so when it regards it as expedient, having regard to the provisions of the development plan and any other material consideration. Any action taken against a breach of planning control shall be proportionate to the breach. In exercising discretion, the Department is mindful of its duty to enforce planning legislation and to ensure that development is managed in a proactive and proportionate manner.

Planning Conditions: Enforcement

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what powers his Department has to enforce planning conditions.
(AQW 26434/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department can take enforcement action where a breach of planning control has occurred and it is deemed expedient to do so. This includes failing to comply with any conditions subject to which planning permission was granted.

Article 76A of The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 provides the Department with the legislative authority to issue a Breach of Condition Notice where a condition has clearly been breached and the threat of prosecution is likely to compel the recipient to comply with the condition.

There is no right of appeal and non-compliance with a breach of Condition Notice within the specified time period is an offence.

The Department investigates all complaints into breaches of planning control and prioritises each complaint as necessary.

Planning Conditions: Properties Vacated

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment, over the last three years, how many properties have been vacated as a result of his Department not enforcing planning conditions.
(AQW 26435/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not hold records on properties that have been vacated or the reasons for the vacancy.

Exploris: Rescue and Rehabilitation of Seals

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment what contingency plans have been made by his Department for the rescue and rehabilitation of seals should the facilities at the Exploris aquarium close.
(AQW 26438/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As explained in my response to AQW 26245/11-15, my Department has no statutory responsibility for the rescue and rehabilitation of seals, although officials do from time to time become involved in rescues and onward transfer of pups to Exploris. The future of the seal pup sanctuary must be considered as part of the deliberations on the future of Exploris and these will include the need for contingency plans if required.

Planning: Mineral Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 25630/11-15, of the last 25 discharge consents that were granted to mineral extraction sites, how many had planning permission.
(AQW 26495/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Of the last 25 discharge consents granted to minerals extraction sites 24 have planning permission. The remaining consent relates to the live planning application for Dalradian Gold, Curraghinalt, Gortin, Omagh.

Exploris

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to assist Ards Borough Council to secure the future of Exploris.
(AQW 26517/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I met a delegation from 'Friends of Exploris' led by Councillor Boyle on 30th September. Having listened carefully to their representations, I then raised the issue with my Ministerial colleagues in the Executive on 3rd October. The Executive asked for more detail about the proposal to allow further discussion at the next Executive meeting on 17th October. Officials are also in contact with Ards Borough Council.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Runway

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the plans to extend the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport.
(AQW 26578/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The planning application to extend the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport was withdrawn by the Airport in March 2012 and no further applications for any extensions have been received.

In March 2012 the Airport also submitted a request to modify the terms of their Planning Agreement with the Department. Further information has been requested to assist that process and the Airport's proposals will be considered at an independent public inquiry in the new year.

Refusal for Retrospective Planning Application

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW/25727/11-15, on what date did the deemed refusal for retrospective planning application A/2009/0400/F become effective; and when the letter of deemed refusal was issued to the applicant in accordance with Regulation 15(2A) of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999.

(AQW 26580/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This application was deemed refused on 4 June 2010 due to the applicant failing to submit further environmental information required to forward the assessment of the proposal.

While a procedural error resulted in no letter issuing to the applicant, advising of the deemed refusal, the application remains deemed refused in accordance with the EIA Regulations.

Taxis

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment (i) when taxis will be required to have meters; and given the outcome of the Review of Taxi Fares and Taxi Fare Structure, what he can do to protect drivers from increases in rent by taxi operators which has the potential to remove any benefit that maximum fares may have on drivers income.

(AQW 26658/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department plans to have legislation requiring the use of taximeters in taxis across Northern Ireland operative in September 2014. It will be necessary to provide for a phased introduction of the mandatory requirement, to allow taxi operators sufficient time to purchase and install the taximeters. The precise duration of this phased introduction will be closely linked to the availability of private sector fitters and sealers, who will be authorised by the Driver and Vehicle Agency to install, calibrate and seal taximeters. Until there is a clear picture of the numbers of authorised fitters and sealers it will not be possible to provide a definitive timetable for the phased introduction. However, my Department aims to ensure that all taxis are fitted with compliant taximeters by the end of 2014.

The Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 provided the Department with powers to establish a maximum taxi fare structure across Northern Ireland. Since the Act was primarily aimed at consumer protection, these powers are limited to the specification of a maximum fare and do not permit the Department to set minimum fares. Any minimum fare levied by operators is driven by market forces and, therefore, outside the remit of the Department.

The level of depot fees, radio circuit fees, rents or other charges levied on drivers by operators are private commercial arrangements and as such are beyond the Department's control.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment when he will publish the final version of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 26686/11-15)

Mr Durkan: After extensive assessment of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission, my Department recently submitted BMAP to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) for assessment of the Plan against the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). I expect DRD's consideration to be completed by 16 October and subject to the Plan being awarded a Certificate of General Conformity, preparations for publication will commence and are expected to take 3 – 4 months. Once completed, I plan to adopt BMAP at the earliest opportunity.

Dereliction Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescales for funding for councils under the current tranche of Dereliction Funding.

(AQW 26707/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As part of this year's June monitoring round my department received funding of £1.5 million for dereliction. This was allocated to 15 councils on 11th July, to be spent before 31 March 2014.

I will continue to seek to secure financial resources for this important scheme.

Dereliction Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much funding is available in the current round of the Demolition Fund.

(AQW 26708/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As part of this year's June monitoring round my department received funding of £1.5 million for dereliction. This was allocated to 15 councils on 11th July, to be spent before 31 March 2014.

I will continue to seek to secure financial resources for this important scheme.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Public Sector Works: Accounts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cases of public sector works being completed without final accounts being signed off; (i) 2 years; (ii) 3 years; (iii) 4 years; (iv) 5 years; and (v) 5+ years after the works were completed.

(AQW 25693/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The number of Government construction works contracts where work is completed and the construction contract final account not agreed are listed in Table 1 attached at Annex A. The figures provided are subject to the explanatory notes below the table.

Annex A

Table 1 - Number of Government construction works contracts where work is complete but the final account not agreed after -

Department of/for	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6+ years	Total
Finance & Personnel	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regional Development	1	0	0	0	0	1
Education	2	1	1	1	1	6
Enterprise, Trade and Investment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Development	0	0	0	0	0	0
Health, Social Services & Public Safety	1	1	0	0	0	2
Employment & Learning	0	0	0	0	0	0
Justice	2	0	0	0	0	2
Culture, Arts & Leisure	3	0	0	0	0	3
Agriculture & Rural Development	0	0	0	0	0	0
the Environment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Office of the First and Deputy First Minister	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public Prosecution Service	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	9	2	1	2	1	15

Explanatory notes.

- Figures only include construction works contracts awarded since the introduction of eSourcingNI in May 2008 (the cost to go back beyond electronic records would be disproportionate for those bodies that rely on such records.)
- Figures only include construction works contracts with departments, their NDPBs, Agencies and Government owned companies.
- Each project is recorded in the column which equates to the maximum length of time for which the final account was not agreed. The total column gives the total number of affected projects.

Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for their assessment of the key issues that the EU Peace Programme IV will need to address; and whether the EU funds allocated for the delivery of a Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre will be utilised.

(AQW 25798/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Based on consultation and research, the key areas emerging for support under PEACE IV include investment in young people, creation of shared space and services, and civic leadership. It is also important that the programme aligns with, and supports, the key objectives of the Together: Building a United Community strategy.

Officials from my Department are working in partnership with SEUPB to develop PEACE IV programme proposals, which will be finalised after full public consultation.

In relation to those funds previously allocated to the delivery of a Peace building and Conflict Resolution Centre, the Special EU Programmes Body is currently considering options for reallocation to suitable alternative projects.

Public Procurement: Advice

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the advice his Department provides to local businesses and companies in relation to accessing public procurement opportunities.

(AQW 26231/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: CPD is actively engaging with the business sector to aid understanding of, and participation in, public procurement by:

- Publication of guidance to address barriers which may prevent local businesses and companies accessing public sector procurement opportunities and encouraging small businesses to develop partnerships or consortiums to overcome gaps in their service for larger contracts.
- Simplifying the procedure for lower value procurements not subject to the same level of European legislation.
- Supporting "Meet the Buyer" events designed to stimulate the local business sector and raise awareness of best practice. This involves working closely with a number of other bodies (such as IntertradeIreland and Invest NI) to promote access to public contract opportunities.
- Encouraging local businesses to register on the e-SourcingNI public procurement portal.

Public Procurement: Living Wage

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment has been made of introducing a living wage requirement within public sector contract procurements.

(AQW 26244/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department has looked in detail at whether the payment of a living wage could be made a condition of public contracts. While the payment of a living wage can be encouraged the introduction of such a requirement within public sector contracts would present a significant legal risk.

This was confirmed by the European Commission in responding to a request for clarification from the Scottish Government. The Commission stated that any requirement to pay a living wage is unlikely to be compatible with European legislation.

Public Procurement: Construction Contracts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the measures introduced by the previous minister in regard to construction contracts on 15th November 2012 and for an update on each of their implementation.

(AQW 26247/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: On 15 November 2012 the Procurement Board, chaired by former Minister Wilson, endorsed a range of measures to assist the construction industry and to protect subcontractors and suppliers in Government construction contracts. The measures include:

- ensuring that contractors are paid within 10 days of the date of their invoice;
- ensuring that all contractors are signed up to the Construction Industry Forum Northern Ireland (CIFNI) Fair Payment Charter;
- ensuring that Project Managers check that subcontractors and suppliers are being paid promptly; and
- ensuring that Government contracts are not awarded to contractors who:
 - use the insolvency legislation to drop debts;
 - fail to pay their subcontractors and suppliers promptly; or
 - submit abnormally low tenders or sub-economic tenders.

The position on implementation of the measures is summarised below:

- on 12 December 2012 former Minister Wilson requested that Executive colleagues implement these measures;
- each of the measures is in place within Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and all steps are being taken to monitor implementation across other Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs);
- CPD has published guidance on abnormally low tenders and insolvency during the procurement process;
- Project Bank Accounts (PBAs) are being introduced on all appropriate construction works contracts procured by CPD where the contract value exceeds £1million and there are significant subcontract opportunities; and
- guidance has been prepared by CPD to facilitate the wider application of PBAs by CoPEs.

Collaborative Procurement Strategy

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand; and to detail his plans to achieve a sufficient balance.

(AQW 26302/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: A revised Strategy for Collaborative Procurement was approved by the Procurement Board on 6 June 2013.

This strategy will allow Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to progress collaboration for the education sector, departments and their sponsored bodies in partnership with the Procurement and Logistics Service (PaLS). Whilst not fully 'pan-government' as recommended in the NIAO Report, the revised strategy has the potential to influence in excess of 85% of spend and represents a pragmatic way of moving forward. There will be a presumption in favour of Translink, NI Water and NIHE using these collaborative arrangements for specified common services and supplies on a comply or explain basis.

A Collaborative Contracts Board has been established and will meet every two months to monitor the progress and provide oversight of the NI Collaborative Procurement Strategy.

A Task and Finish Group has been established with representation from the Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) to develop a procurement pipeline for collaborative arrangements and agree benchmarking proposals.

CPD has initiated a spend analysis in conjunction with the Cabinet Office's Government Procurement Service (GPS). This analysis will capture approximately 90% of the total spend across all bodies covered by Public Procurement Policy. The analysis will be concluded by the end of November 2013 and will provide information on expenditure for the agreed collaborative categories of spend.

CPD has put in place structures to take forward collaborative arrangements for the following categories:

- Postal Services;
- Advertising;
- Banking;
- Energy; and
- Travel.

The remaining collaborative categories will be implemented from April 2014 namely:

- Office Supplies;
- Telecoms and Networking;
- Facilities Management;
- IT commodities; and
- Fleet.

To ensure commitment to the collaborative arrangements the SLAs for CPD clients will:

- mandate the use of the arrangements established through the CCB;
- allow CPD access to the client's financial systems for spend analysis and benchmarking purposes;
- identify a single point of contact for collaboration within each department to assist in the collection of data on future demands and requirements within designated areas of common spend;
- require clients to report annually to the Procurement Board on non-compliant expenditure by their department or arms length bodies outside the common procurement categories.

Collaborative Procurement Strategy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the actions identified in response to the audit office report on procurement.

(AQW 26312/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: A revised Strategy for Collaborative Procurement was approved by the Procurement Board on 6 June 2013.

This strategy will allow Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to progress collaboration for the education sector, departments and their sponsored bodies in partnership with the Procurement and Logistics Service (PaLS). Whilst not fully 'pan-government' as recommended in the NIAO Report, the revised strategy has the potential to influence in excess of 85% of spend and represents a pragmatic way of moving forward. There will be a presumption in favour of Translink, NI Water and NIHE using these collaborative arrangements for specified common services and supplies on a comply or explain basis.

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- IT commodities; and
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- allow CPD access to the client's financial systems for spend analysis and benchmarking purposes;
- identify a single point of contact for collaboration within each department to assist in the collection of data on future demands and requirements within designated areas of common spend;
- require clients to report annually to the Procurement Board on non-compliant expenditure by their department or arms length bodies outside the common procurement categories.

Cycle to Work Scheme: Promotion

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if the cycle to work scheme has been promoted equally within all public service departments and organisations that are applicable and if the scheme is advertised annually to all civil servants. (AQW 26378/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NICS Cycle to Work Scheme is advertised and promoted annually at a corporate level. The scheme is available to all Civil Servants however it is not open to non Civil Servants who work for public service departments, NDPBs and ALBs. I am aware however that a number of these organisations run their own Cycle to Work schemes.

Councils: Closure of Facilities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any evidence of a growing trend in councils of closing visitor attractions, leisure facilities, community or amenity facilities that were initially jointly funded by Government and/or European funding provided on a three year sustainability basis; and if any funded activities are under pressure from closure or additional funding requirements.

(AQW 26449/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Visitor attractions, leisure facilities and community or amenity facilities are not the policy responsibility of this Department.

Rate Relief: Pensioners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how many pensioners were in receipt of at least one form of rate relief in (i) 2006; and (ii) 2012.

(AQW 26618/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Information for 2006 is not available.

Information on how many pensioners were in receipt of at least one form of rate relief in 2012 is not available as the LPS information system does not hold information on gender and it is therefore not possible to identify those who are in receipt of pension. Information is available on the number of persons aged 60 or older who were in receipt of Housing Benefit for Rates, Low Income Rate Relief or Lone Pensioner Allowance. As at 31st March 2013, a total of 66,639 people aged 60 or over were in receipt of one or more of these benefits as shown in the table below. A further 8,902 persons were in receipt of Disabled Persons Allowance only. From the information available it is not possible to say how many of these Disabled Persons Allowance recipients were aged 60 or older.

Rate Relief Type	Number of Persons aged 60 or older receiving the relief
Housing Benefit for Rates	41,687
Low Income Rate Relief	11,445
Lone Pensioner Allowance ¹	22,623
At least one form of Rate Relief ²	66,639

1 Must be aged 70 or older

2 Individuals may be in receipt of more than one relief.

This information relates to the reliefs administered by Land & Property Services for owner occupiers.

Graduate Recruitment: NICS

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of graduates recruited by the Northern Ireland Civil Service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26673/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The majority of Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) posts do not require applicants to have a degree therefore the NICS does not hold information on the number of graduates who have been appointed through such competitions.

The table attached outlines the number of graduates appointed through the Northern Ireland Fast Stream scheme (2011-2013) and the previous Degree Holder competitions (2008-2009) for which a degree is an entry requirement.

Year of appointment	Number of Appointments made
2013	15
2012	12
2011	6
2010	No appointments were made in 2010 due to an embargo on NICS recruitment.
2009	27
2008	47

Graduate Recruitment: Campaign

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has any plans to launch a graduate recruitment campaign within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

(AQW 26685/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NICS has been participating in the Fast Stream scheme run through GB Civil Service Resourcing since 2011. The NI Fast Stream is an accelerated training and development programme for degree holders who have the potential to become senior managers within the NI Civil Service. Applications are currently being accepted for the 2014 scheme; the closing date for applications is 31 October 2013.

The NICS does not have any plans to run any additional graduate campaigns at this time.

Housing Executive: Response Maintenance Contracts

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the precise action his Department taken following recommendation 10 of the Public Accounts Committee report of March 2013 on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive: management of response maintenance contracts.

(AQW 26687/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report and associated formal response, in the form of a Memorandum of Reply, was circulated by my officials to all departmental and Agency Accounting Officers and Finance Directors on 19 June 2013. In that correspondence, attention was drawn to several key PAC recommendations, including recommendation 10.

Accounting Officers and Finance Directors were asked to review the documents in the context of their own organisations, and to ensure that they were given appropriate circulation both within their own organisations and to sponsored bodies.

Unemployment: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of unemployed people in North Down under the age of twenty five, in each quarter of each of the last six years.

(AQW 26705/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and estimates of the number of unemployed people under the age of twenty-five in North Down District Council Area are not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around the estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The following table is sourced instead to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons aged under 25 claiming unemployment related benefits at February, May, August and November of each year since 2007.

Table 1: Claimant count for people aged under 25 in North Down District Council Area

Date	Number	% of 16-24 population
February 2007	270	3.2
May 2007	250	3.0
August 2007	255	3.0
November 2007	210	2.5
February 2008	235	2.8
May 2008	215	2.6
August 2008	300	3.6
November 2008	320	3.9
February 2009	435	5.2
May 2009	445	5.4
August 2009	530	6.4
November 2009	455	5.5
February 2010	545	6.6
May 2010	510	6.2
August 2010	565	6.8
November 2010	530	6.4
February 2011	530	6.5
May 2011	485	6.0
August 2011	580	7.1
November 2011	515	6.3
February 2012	555	7.0
May 2012	530	6.7
August 2012	570	7.2
November 2012	515	6.5
February 2013	520	6.6
May 2013	450	5.7
August 2013	500	6.3

Public Procurement: Cabinet Office Mystery Shopper

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the recently updated Suppliers Charter to detail the arrangements in place which allow the Director of Central Procurement Directorate to refer complaints to the Cabinet Office Mystery Shopper Team for an independent review.

(AQW 26755/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Cabinet Office recognises the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) as the lead body for procurement in Northern Ireland. In 2009 CPD set up an arrangement with the Supplier Feedback Service (now known as the Mystery Shopper Scheme) to carry out an independent review of supplier complaints if requested to do so by the Director of CPD.

In such cases the CPD Director will take the outcome of the review into consideration when considering the supplier's complaint.

Public Procurement: Mystery Shopper Scope and Remit

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the recently updated Cabinet Office document Mystery Shopper: scope and remit, which states that it shall not intervene "where the case relates to procurement activity by the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland;" and whether this impacts on the current Central Procurement Directorate Suppliers Charter.

(AQW 26759/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The arrangement Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) currently has with the Mystery Shopper Scheme, within the Cabinet Office, is to provide an independent review of supplier complaints under CPD's Supplier Charter. This arrangement is not affected by the recent update to the Mystery Shopper Scheme.

The reference to devolved administrations in the Mystery Shopper Scope and Remit document is intended to confirm that suppliers should direct their complaint to the relevant Northern Ireland authority, in the first instance, rather than the Mystery Shopper Scheme. However if CPD does receive a complaint the CPD Director may still ask the Mystery Shopper Team to conduct an independent review before making a decision on the outcome of the complaint.

Vacant Domestic Dwellings in the Dungannon South Tyrone Council District Electoral Areas

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant domestic dwellings in the Dungannon South Tyrone Council District Electoral Areas.

(AQW 26784/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Information on the number of vacant domestic dwellings in the Dungannon South Tyrone Council District Electoral Areas is not available as information is collated at district council and ward area.

At 30th September 2013, a total of 1,520 domestic dwellings in the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council area were recorded as vacant.

Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes legislation on 1st October 2011 the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete.

Bank Lending

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any discussions he has had with the British Bankers' Association regarding the publication of lending details for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 26793/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I met with Anthony Browne, Chief Executive of the BBA, on the 11 September 2013 to discuss the provision of SME bank lending data for Northern Ireland.

As you may be aware, my Department currently receives a quarterly 'bank support for businesses in Northern Ireland' report on a confidential basis from the British Bankers Association (BBA) which provides high level data on deposits and lending to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises locally.

This data relates to the activities of the four main banks operating locally and my Department has been pressing for some time now for this to be widened to include other banks with a presence in Northern Ireland. We have also been calling for the scope of the data provided to be extended, and in particular for a sectoral breakdown to be provided.

Mr Browne indicated to me that he hoped that an improved dataset would be available before the end of the year and that he would update me on the precise detail of this in due course.

Household Expenditure: Food

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of total expenditure the average household spends on food.

(AQW 26831/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Based on the most recent information available from the Living Costs & Food Survey (LCF), households in Northern Ireland spent an average of 19.0% of total weekly household expenditure on food and non-alcoholic drinks. This includes expenditure on 'food & non-alcoholic drinks' in shops/supermarkets, 'restaurant & café meals', 'take away meals eaten at home', 'other take away and snack food' and 'contract catering & canteens'. The table overleaf provides a breakdown for each of the categories listed as a percentage of total weekly household expenditure.

Commodity or Service	Percentage of Total Household Expenditure*
Food & non-alcoholic drinks	11.8%
Restaurant & café meals	3.8%
Take away meals eaten at home	1.6%
Other take away and snack food	1.2%
Contract catering & canteens	0.6%
All food & non-alcoholic drinks	19.0%

* Includes expenditure on Housing (mortgage payments, rent, rates, etc)

Household Expenditure: Fuel and Gas

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of total expenditure the average household spends on fuel and gas.

(AQW 26833/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Based on the most recent information available from the Living Costs & Food Survey (LCF), households in Northern Ireland spent an average of 12.3% of total weekly household expenditure on fuel and gas. Expenditure on fuel includes 'electricity', 'other fuels (including home heating oil)' and 'petrol, diesel & other motor oils'. The table overleaf provides a breakdown for each of the categories listed as a percentage of total weekly household expenditure.

Commodity or Service	Percentage of Total Household Expenditure*
Electricity	2.3%
Gas	0.4%
Other Fuels (inc. home heating oil)	3.2%
Petrol, diesel & other motor oils	6.4%
All fuel and gas	12.3%

* Includes expenditure on Housing (mortgage payments, rent, rates, etc)

Unemployment: Newtownabbey and Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of unemployed people, under the age of 25, in the (i) Newtownabbey Borough Council; and (ii) Antrim Borough Council area in each quarter for the last six years.

(AQW 26843/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and estimates of the number of unemployed people under the age of twenty-five in Newtownabbey and Antrim District Council Areas are not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around the estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The following table is sourced instead to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons aged under 25 claiming unemployment related benefits at February, May, August and November of each year since 2007.

Table 1: Claimant count for people aged under 25 in Newtownabbey and Antrim District Council Areas (DCA)

Date	Antrim DCA		Newtownabbey DCA	
	Number	% of 16-24 Population	Number	% of 16-24 Population
February 2007	175	2.8	330	3.2
May 2007	115	1.9	300	2.9
August 2007	150	2.5	280	2.7
November 2007	110	1.7	215	2.1
February 2008	160	2.6	255	2.4
May 2008	175	2.8	280	2.6
August 2008	210	3.4	355	3.4
November 2008	270	4.4	420	4.0
February 2009	380	6.0	545	5.1
May 2009	360	5.7	595	5.6
August 2009	400	6.3	685	6.5
November 2009	370	5.9	595	5.6
February 2010	435	7.0	635	5.9
May 2010	390	6.3	615	5.7
August 2010	435	7.1	655	6.1
November 2010	375	6.1	630	5.9
February 2011	385	6.3	690	6.5

Date	Antrim DCA		Newtownabbey DCA	
	Number	% of 16-24 Population	Number	% of 16-24 Population
May 2011	380	6.2	635	6.0
August 2011	420	6.8	700	6.6
November 2011	385	6.3	695	6.6
February 2012	400	6.6	710	6.8
May 2012	400	6.6	720	7.0
August 2012	400	6.6	750	7.2
November 2012	385	6.4	665	6.4
February 2013	390	6.5	675	6.5
May 2013	350	5.7	640	6.2
August 2013	350	5.8	665	6.4

Emigration

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the rate of local emigration.
(AQO 4809/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The attached table contains estimates of out-migration from Northern Ireland to Great Britain (column A) and to countries outside the UK (column B) for each year in the period mid-2000 to mid2012. The total out-migration rate per 1,000 population is also shown.

Year ending	Migration to Great Britain (A)	Migration to countries outside the UK (B)	Total out migration (A+B)	Total outmigration rate per 1,000 population
Mid-2001	11,669	7,609	19,278	11.5
Mid-2002	11,589	6,393	17,982	10.6
Mid-2003	11,005	6,683	17,688	10.4
Mid-2004	11,858	6,996	18,854	11.1
Mid-2005	11,291	8,861	20,152	11.8
Mid-2006	11,510	8,797	20,307	11.8
Mid-2007	11,142	10,633	21,775	12.5
Mid-2008	10,707	11,981	22,688	12.9
Mid-2009	10,198	11,406	21,604	12.1
Mid-2010	11,279	12,115	23,394	13.0
Mid-2011	11,121	14,097	25,218	14.0
Mid-2012	12,090	12,480	24,570	13.5

Cycle to Work Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to detail any planned measures to promote the Civil Service cycle to work scheme.

(AQW 26858/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NICS Cycle to Work Scheme is advertised and promoted annually at a corporate level. It is due to be promoted again in January 2014 to all civil servants via e-mail, the HRConnect portal and directly to those staff who don't have access to the NICS HR computer system.

Public Sector Employment

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 25825/11-15, which states no local figure for Gross Domestic Product, to detail the source of the information contained in his recent speech to the Confederation of British Industry, in which he stated that “roughly 1/3 of our workforce are employed in the public sector. About 2/3 of our GDP comes from government”.

(AQW 26885/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Figures from the Business Register and Employment Survey show that the public sector accounts for 31% of the total employee jobs in Northern Ireland for 2012 (211,800 jobs out of a total of 680,402).

In broad terms, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross Value Added (GVA) are both used to measure the output of an economy, although there are technical distinctions between them. The figures quoted referred to total identifiable expenditure expressed as a proportion of the total GVA for Northern Ireland. Information for NI “Identifiable Expenditure” in 2011 is available in HM Treasury’s Public Expenditure Statistics Analysis publication. GVA for NI in 2011 is available from the Office for National Statistics Regional Accounts. “Identifiable Expenditure” when expressed as a percentage of total GVA is approximately 65% of total GVA for Northern Ireland in 2011.

Public Procurement: Executive Contracts

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he plans to reform procurement procedures to make it easier for small businesses to bid for Executive contracts.

(AQO 4806/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Over the last two years a number of changes have been made to procurement procedures to make it easier for small businesses to access public contract opportunities. This programme of change continues. For example, CPD is working to simplify and standardise contracts across Centres of Procurement Expertise. This will help to reduce the cost burden of preparing tender documentation.

CPD will also be availing of the scope to simplify processes contained within the new EU Procurement Directives. This includes a range of measures which will help small businesses including:

- A much simpler process for checking bidders credentials;
- A reduction in the minimum time limits by which suppliers have to respond helping to bring procurement to the market more quickly;
- Buyers being encouraged to break large contracts into lots to facilitate SME participation; and
- A turnover cap that will prevent buyers from setting turnover requirements at more than twice the contract value.

UK Statutory Instrument 2013 No 908

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, (i) to explain the significance of UK Statutory Instrument 2013 No 908, which came into force on 14 May 2013 and was issued under the title The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (No.2) Regulations 2013; (ii) to confirm when his Department first became aware of this amending regulation; and (iii) to indicate what changes, if any, will be required to the guidance contained within DAO (DFP) 04/13.

(AQW 26960/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: UK Statutory Instrument 2013 No. 908 amends the provision governing the late payment of commercial debt by removing the provision which could have given debtors a further 30 days payment period after an acceptance and verification procedure has been completed.

My department was made aware of the amending regulation in late August 2013.

DAO (DFP) 04/13 was amended on 3 September 2013 by removing the bullet point below in paragraph 5 of the DAO and reissued on the same day to all Accounting Officers.

‘Verification or acceptance of goods and services should not as a general rule exceed 30 days. Nevertheless, it is possible for the verification procedure to exceed 30 days if it has been agreed by both parties and is not grossly unfair to the supplier.’

Public Procurement: Civil Service

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the guidelines and policy governing procurement across the Civil Service.

(AQW 26986/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Public Procurement by Northern Ireland Departments and their Arm’s Length Bodies is subject to Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy approved by the Executive in 2002. This policy is supported by Procurement Guidance Notes, approved by the Procurement Board, which disseminate the policy and best practice in compliance with EU and UK legislation. These notes can be accessed via the CPD website.

Document Retention

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how long Departments have to retain documents.
(AQW 27012/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Departments retain records in line with their disposal and retention schedules which are compiled in accordance with NI public records legislation, other relevant legislation, such as the Data Protection Act 1998 and also take into account ongoing Departmental business need. The process requires the approval of the DCAL Minister as Keeper of the Records.

The disposal and retention schedules have been laid at the NI Assembly under Section 8 (2) of the Public Records Act (NI), 1923 and in accordance with the Rules of the Disposal of Documents Order 1925, by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

The schedules are approved by the Assembly by 'negative resolution'. Copies are available in the Assembly Library.

Altnagelvin Hospital and Causeway Hospital: Live Births

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many live births were recorded at (i) Altnagelvin Hospital; and (ii) Causeway Hospital during 2012; and of these, how many of the mothers had an address in the Limavady Borough Council area.

(AQW 27025/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There were 2,741 live births registered in 2012 where the place of birth was Altnagelvin Hospital. Of these, 405 mothers had an address in Limavady Borough Council area.^P

There were 1,413 live births registered in 2012 where the place of birth was Causeway Hospital. Of these, 49 mothers had an address in Limavady Borough Council area.^P

^P Data for 2012 remains provisional until the publication of the Annual Report of the Registrar General in late 2013.

Revenue Estimates

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his analysis of the revenue estimates published by Revenue and Customs on 2 October 2013.

(AQO 4798/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The publication of these estimates is a positive development as the Treasury and HMRC has in the past been reluctant to produce any sort of regional tax figures.

In terms of the figures themselves, it is important to recognise that they do not represent a precise quantification of tax receipts generated in Northern Ireland and have been published as an experimental series. The majority of revenue lines are based on estimated shares of national tax receipts rather than specific regional data. This is a similar approach to the one we take in producing our Net Fiscal Balance Report Series.

My officials are currently considering the detail of these estimates and will liaise with HMRC as required, as we take forward our own work on this area.

Enterprise Zones

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to the introduction of Enterprise Zones.
(AQO 4799/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In line with the commitments contained in the Economic Pact, we are currently considering the merits of establishing Enterprise Zones that would have the ability to offer Enhanced Capital Allowances in Northern Ireland. Enterprise Zones in GB offer a number of incentives, including business rate discounts, simplified planning, superfast broadband and, in a small number of cases, Enhanced Capital Allowances. The Executive already has policies in place to support businesses across all of Northern Ireland using rates, broadband provision and planning. The Enhanced Capital Allowances element is the only aspect that is not already devolved.

Public Sector Reform

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the new 11 councils could participate in his Reform Agenda.
(AQO 4800/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I established the Public Sector Reform Division to be a catalyst for change and improvement by supporting departments and arms length bodies in delivering more effective and efficient public services.

In this context, the new reformed structure of local government creates opportunities for the new, larger councils to become part of the collaborative procurement and shared services operated by DFP, should this be requested by the new councils.

In addition, when identifying best practice reform measures that could be applied in Northern Ireland Executive departments I think there would be merit in offering the support of the Public Sector Reform Division to also cover the services provided by local councils, where appropriate and with the prior agreement of the respective local councils.

At the same time, there may also be reforms taking place or being considered within local councils that could be applied more widely across the public sector in Northern Ireland.

OECD Meeting

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on his recent meeting with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

(AQO 4801/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I recently met with representatives from OECD teams engaged in research in a number of public sector areas such as procurement, budget treatment, shared services and governance reviews.

These meetings were extremely interesting and directly relevant to the reform agenda that I believe this Executive needs to pursue. A small regional economy such as ours needs to ensure that we are at the forefront of international best practice when it comes to delivering public services.

I am convinced that there are significant opportunities to exploit in both central and local government. For example can we make our procurement practices more streamlined, can we roll out the shared services we have and IT platforms in a manner that allows the new 11 councils to avail of the transformations that are happening with central government.

The OECD teams helpfully presented me with some specific practical exemplars from elsewhere and I will be exploring how best these lessons might be applied here.

Availing of these opportunities now will mean that arbitrary, across-the-board cuts in the pursuit of theoretical efficiencies becomes less important and needed and our citizens actually have lean and efficient public service interfaces.

Flagpoles

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why no equality screening or consultation with staff was undertaken before the decision was taken to erect new flagpoles on Government buildings.

(AQO 4802/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There was no requirement to carry out any equality screening in relation to the erection of flagpoles nor for consultation with staff in respect of these decisions taken regarding what are DFP managed buildings within the Government office estate.

NAMA: Loan Book

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the National Asset Management Agency loan book.

(AQO 4803/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I met with the NAMA Chairman, Mr Frank Daly, last week who updated me on the Agency's management of its Northern Ireland assets.

In terms of the overall size of NAMA's Northern Ireland portfolio, the acquisition value of this was €1.3 billion, which is a substantial holding. We have been advised that this comprises 18% office accommodation; 17% retail; 10% residential; 5% development; and 3% hotel and leisure assets, with the balance made up of land at 25% of the portfolio and 22% other investment assets. Approximately 80% of this is located in counties Antrim and Down with around 46% specifically in Belfast.

Clearly NAMA will have a significant impact on our local economy and property market for some time to come and I will continue to liaise with the Agency on a regular basis to ensure the best interests of Northern Ireland are served.

Ulster Bank

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the current situation with regard to the future structure of Ulster Bank.

(AQO 4804/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Treasury are carrying out a review of the RBS Group, including Ulster Bank, as part of their response to the Parliamentary Commission Report on Banking Standards which was published in June.

I have written to the Chancellor to outline the importance of Ulster Bank to the local economy and how any decision to place all of it in any sort of bad bank would be hugely damaging for us.

I asked that Treasury's consideration of the options for RBS separately considers the impact on Northern Ireland. At this point in time I have not yet had any indication from HMT on any future structure.

Civil Law Reform

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Bain Review of Civil Law Reform and the legislation being considered.

(AQO 4805/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Professor Sir George Bain has never undertaken a review of civil law reform. In relation to the work of my Department, he did chair a Legal Services Review Group that reported on the regulation of the legal profession outlining a number of recommendations for reform.

I have considered those proposals and a draft Bill has been prepared that is currently under consideration by my Executive colleagues. I hope to consult on that Bill shortly with a view to bringing a Bill before the Assembly in 2014.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Minister of the Environment regarding possible Driver and Vehicle Agency job losses, including the cost of transferring the related powers from Westminster to the Assembly.

(AQO 4808/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At the outset I wish to clarify that Vehicle Licensing and Registration is a reserved matter and is not devolved to the NI Assembly. To date I have had no discussions with the Minister of the Environment regarding the Department of Transport's (DfT) proposal to centralise the delivery of vehicle and registration services at the Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Foyle Hospice, Derry: Funding

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the funding shortfall in Foyle Hospice, Derry is being addressed.

(AQW 26350/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Responsibility for the commissioning of health and social care services lies with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)/Public Health Agency (PHA).

The HSCB/PHA is finalising a Review of palliative and end of life care services commissioned from the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. Part of the Review covers legacy funding arrangements with all Hospices. HSCB and PHA representatives will shortly meet with representatives from Foyle Hospice to discuss the findings of the Review with a view to ensuring appropriate funding within the current financial year and thereafter.

AQO 4576/11-15

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his response to my supplementary to AQO 4576/11-15, when he expects to receive "an answer from the bodies involved on why they have not changed that decision".

(AQW 26353/11-15)

Mr Poots: Further to my response to AQO 4576/11-15 I wish to clarify that Belfast Health and Social Care Trust clinicians took the decision to introduce a more rigorous case selection in July 2012 that only children in the lowest risk categories would be considered suitable for paediatric congenital cardiac surgery (PCCS) in Belfast. This was extended in November 2012 to include all children below the age of one who require open heart surgery. This followed discussion between the Trust, the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency and the Department, and reflected prudent application of the principle that precautions should be applied.

In my response I also stated that: "I understand that, subsequent to that, there was an independent assessment of that decision, which indicated that it was wrong". The only independent assessment concerning PCCS that has been carried out in relation to the Belfast Trust, since July 2012, is a validation by the UK national Congenital Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD) which demonstrates that patient outcomes for procedures carried out at the Belfast Trust in 2011/12 were within acceptable control limits as set by CCAD. Therefore I need to correct my response and confirm that there has been no independent assessment of the decision taken by the Trust to introduce a more rigorous case selection and that decision remains in place, nor has the Trust proposed any change in the risk profile of surgery at Belfast since that time. The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency accepted the action taken by the Belfast Trust as appropriate and proportionate.

Reablement Services

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the roll-out for the Re-ablement Services Programme; and to outline any difficulties with the roll-out, including the effect this will have on delivering Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 26405/11-15)

Mr Poots: Reablement is a key strand of delivering the vision set out in Transforming Your Care, designed to avoid premature dependence on services and support people to live independently in their own homes for longer. The Health & Social Care

Board (HSCB) initiated the regional project board for reablement in September 2011 and subsequently developed a regional model which was issued to HSC Trusts in March 2012 to provide a standardised framework for implementation.

Trusts have developed implementation plans in accordance with this model and reablement services are being rolled out. Reablement services are being delivered across the entire Northern Trust area, and in October the South Eastern Trust aims to also have full coverage. The Belfast Trust is on track to deliver reablement services across the locality by the end of the year and there is currently about 50% coverage in the Southern and Western Trust localities. There are components of the model e.g. complementary voluntary and community sector services where further work and investment is required.

The HSCB has advised that Local Commissioning Groups have invested a significant amount of demographic funding via the HSC Trusts in the last two years to assist the transition to full operation of reablement services. There have been challenges in the roll-out, one of which has been the availability of Occupational Therapists. The HSCB is working closely with Trusts to resolve any challenges to implementation and meetings have been planned to discuss and agree a skill mix for Occupational Therapy in the new service model.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Myocardial Infarction

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether ambulance paramedics in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust no longer carry clot-buster drugs for administration in myocardial infarction and instead move patients to specified hospitals, depending on the area in which the incident occurs.

(AQW 26474/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised that emergency ambulance crews in its Southern Operational Division (which is co-terminus with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust) are continuing to carry thrombolysis packs (often referred to as “clot busting drugs”).

This is in order to deliver this treatment to heart attack patients outside the current catchment area for the first phase of the regional primary percutaneous coronary intervention (PPCI) service, based in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

Hospital Appointments: Public Transport

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will take steps to make it easier for older people, who are in receipt of pension credit, to access a refund when using public transport to attend hospital appointments.

(AQW 26481/11-15)

Mr Poots: The majority of people receiving pension credit will be eligible for free travel on public transport through the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme (Senior Citizen SmartPass/60+ SmartPass). For those older people who do not have a SmartPass and are in receipt of Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme can provide help with the cost of travel to hospital by public transport.

Health and Social Care Trusts have local arrangements in place to ensure that information is widely available to patients about the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme and how to claim reimbursement. Measures taken by Trusts include displaying posters and notices in public areas of hospitals, in wards and at hospital Cash Offices; making leaflets and claim forms readily available to patients; and providing information on Trust websites. Information about the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme and how to claim is also available on the NI Direct website.

Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 26496/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need - is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCT area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include

a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

- (i) Motivate was evaluated in terms of effectiveness of the primary endpoint of the pilot (weight loss), clinical outcomes and objective indices of cardiovascular health, objective mental health outcomes and cost effectiveness through use of healthcare resources and pharmacological treatments.
- (ii) Given the small numbers that have been involved in the Fun, Food and Fitness programme, it would not be appropriate to comment on its effectiveness at this stage.

5 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Motivate Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) 2,011 patient referrals were made to Motivate over a 24 month period (May 2009 - May 2011). 183 attended their individual end of program or 6 month review appointment.
- (ii) Patients who completed 3 months of the program lost on average 3% of their body weight; patients who completed 6 months of the program lost on average 6% of their body weight; 50% of patients who completed 6 months of the program were followed up on average 10 months post completion, these patients continued to lose weight, average weight loss at 10 months was 7%.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: positive changes to biochemical markers after 6 months; improved general cardiac health, reduction in anxiety & depression levels; and improved quality of life which included vitality, physical role functioning, mental health and overall general health.
- (iv) Economic evaluation of the program was carried out by health economists and reviewed by the NHSCF finance team independent of the Motivate team. The cost-effectiveness of this programme is currently being considered.

6 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) The pilot program for adults has been evaluated and indicates that 8 adults were invited, 6 attended, and 2 discharged. The children's programme enrolled 24 participants.
- (ii) The 6 who completed the adult programme averaged a 5.67% weight loss and a 5.53% reduction in BMI. Of the 4 from this pilot who attended the final group evaluation session results indicated an average weight loss of 8.64% and an 8.59% reduction in BMI. Of the 24 who enrolled for the children's (4-16 years) programme average weight loss at 3 months was 2.38kg. At the 6 month review, 50% demonstrated a reduction in BMI and around one third demonstrated weight loss. Of the children who had waist circumference measured at 6 months, around four fifths had a reduction and over 10% had maintained their baseline waist circumference.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: nutrition questionnaire indicated 70% maintained or improved eating habits, 43% demonstrated increase in physical activity levels, 44.4% children reported improved body esteem and 60% had improved their behaviour and well-being.
- (iv) I have been informed that information on its cost effectiveness is not available at this time.

7 Given that the effectiveness of the Motivate Programme has already been established, for the rationale behind the decision to introduce the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme, which has similar aims.

The Trust has informed me that the Fun, Food and Fitness program was piloted to incorporate the most up to date weight management evidence into current dietetic practice. The program contains a family based approach for adults and children with 3 strands: one-to-one dietetic consultations, Cook-It and a physical activity component, provided in partnership with the local councils. A family based approach was taken to improve and help sustain behavioural change in the longer term for both the adults and children involved.

Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out.

(AQW 26497/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need – is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCT area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

- (i) Motivate was evaluated in terms of effectiveness of the primary endpoint of the pilot (weight loss), clinical outcomes and objective indices of cardiovascular health, objective mental health outcomes and cost effectiveness through use of healthcare resources and pharmacological treatments.
- (ii) Given the small numbers that have been involved in the Fun, Food and Fitness programme, it would not be appropriate to comment on its effectiveness at this stage.

5 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Motivate Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) 2,011 patient referrals were made to Motivate over a 24 month period (May 2009 - May 2011). 183 attended their individual end of program or 6 month review appointment.
- (ii) Patients who completed 3 months of the program lost on average 3% of their body weight; patients who completed 6 months of the program lost on average 6% of their body weight; 50% of patients who completed 6 months of the program were followed up on average 10 months post completion, these patients continued to lose weight, average weight loss at 10 months was 7%.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: positive changes to biochemical markers after 6 months; improved general cardiac health, reduction in anxiety & depression levels; and improved quality of life which included vitality, physical role functioning, mental health and overall general health.
- (iv) Economic evaluation of the program was carried out by health economists and reviewed by the NHSCT finance team independent of the Motivate team. The cost-effectiveness of this programme is currently being considered.

6 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) The pilot program for adults has been evaluated and indicates that 8 adults were invited, 6 attended, and 2 discharged. The children's programme enrolled 24 participants.
- (ii) The 6 who completed the adult programme averaged a 5.67% weight loss and a 5.53% reduction in BMI. Of the 4 from this pilot who attended the final group evaluation session results indicated an average weight loss

of 8.64% and an 8.59% reduction in BMI. Of the 24 who enrolled for the children's (4-16 years) programme average weight loss at 3 months was 2.38kg. At the 6 month review, 50% demonstrated a reduction in BMI and around one third demonstrated weight loss. Of the children who had waist circumference measured at 6 months, around four fifths had a reduction and over 10% had maintained their baseline waist circumference.

- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: nutrition questionnaire indicated 70% maintained or improved eating habits, 43% demonstrated increase in physical activity levels, 44.4% children reported improved body esteem and 60% had improved their behaviour and well-being.
- (iv) I have been informed that information on its cost effectiveness is not available at this time.

7 Given that the effectiveness of the Motivate Programme has already been established, for the rationale behind the decision to introduce the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme, which has similar aims.

The Trust has informed me that the Fun, Food and Fitness program was piloted to incorporate the most up to date weight management evidence into current dietetic practice. The program contains a family based approach for adults and children with 3 strands: one-to-one dietetic consultations, Cook-It and a physical activity component, provided in partnership with the local councils. A family based approach was taken to improve and help sustain behavioural change in the longer term for both the adults and children involved.

Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme.

(AQW 26498/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need - is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCT area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

- (i) Motivate was evaluated in terms of effectiveness of the primary endpoint of the pilot (weight loss), clinical outcomes and objective indices of cardiovascular health, objective mental health outcomes and cost effectiveness through use of healthcare resources and pharmacological treatments.
- (ii) Given the small numbers that have been involved in the Fun, Food and Fitness programme, it would not be appropriate to comment on its effectiveness at this stage.

5 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Motivate Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) 2,011 patient referrals were made to Motivate over a 24 month period (May 2009 - May 2011). 183 attended their individual end of program or 6 month review appointment.
- (ii) Patients who completed 3 months of the program lost on average 3% of their body weight; patients who completed 6 months of the program lost on average 6% of their body weight; 50% of patients who completed

6 months of the program were followed up on average 10 months post completion, these patients continued to lose weight, average weight loss at 10 months was 7%.

- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: positive changes to biochemical markers after 6 months; improved general cardiac health, reduction in anxiety & depression levels; and improved quality of life which included vitality, physical role functioning, mental health and overall general health.
- (iv) Economic evaluation of the program was carried out by health economists and reviewed by the NHSCT finance team independent of the Motivate team. The cost-effectiveness of this programme is currently being considered.

6 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) The pilot program for adults has been evaluated and indicates that 8 adults were invited, 6 attended, and 2 discharged. The children's programme enrolled 24 participants.
- (ii) The 6 who completed the adult programme averaged a 5.67% weight loss and a 5.53% reduction in BMI. Of the 4 from this pilot who attended the final group evaluation session results indicated an average weight loss of 8.64% and an 8.59% reduction in BMI. Of the 24 who enrolled for the children's (4-16 years) programme average weight loss at 3 months was 2.38kg. At the 6 month review, 50% demonstrated a reduction in BMI and around one third demonstrated weight loss. Of the children who had waist circumference measured at 6 months, around four fifths had a reduction and over 10% had maintained their baseline waist circumference.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: nutrition questionnaire indicated 70% maintained or improved eating habits, 43% demonstrated increase in physical activity levels, 44.4% children reported improved body esteem and 60% had improved their behaviour and well-being.
- (iv) I have been informed that information on its cost effectiveness is not available at this time.

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The Trust has informed me that the Fun, Food and Fitness program was piloted to incorporate the most up to date weight management evidence into current dietetic practice. The program contains a family based approach for adults and children with 3 strands: one-to-one dietetic consultations, Cook-It and a physical activity component, provided in partnership with the local councils. A family based approach was taken to improve and help sustain behavioural change in the longer term for both the adults and children involved.

Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

(AQW 26500/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need - is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCT area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

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- (iv) Economic evaluation of the program was carried out by health economists and reviewed by the NHSCT finance team independent of the Motivate team. The cost-effectiveness of this programme is currently being considered.

6 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

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Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many patients have taken part in the Motivate Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.
(AQW 26501/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need – is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCT area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

- (i) Motivate was evaluated in terms of effectiveness of the primary endpoint of the pilot (weight loss), clinical outcomes and objective indices of cardiovascular health, objective mental health outcomes and cost effectiveness through use of healthcare resources and pharmacological treatments.
- (ii) Given the small numbers that have been involved in the Fun, Food and Fitness programme, it would not be appropriate to comment on its effectiveness at this stage.

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- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: positive changes to biochemical markers after 6 months; improved general cardiac health, reduction in anxiety & depression levels; and improved quality of life which included vitality, physical role functioning, mental health and overall general health.
- (iv) Economic evaluation of the program was carried out by health economists and reviewed by the NHSCT finance team independent of the Motivate team. The cost-effectiveness of this programme is currently being considered.

6 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) The pilot program for adults has been evaluated and indicates that 8 adults were invited, 6 attended, and 2 discharged. The children's programme enrolled 24 participants.
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- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: nutrition questionnaire indicated 70% maintained or improved eating habits, 43% demonstrated increase in physical activity levels, 44.4% children reported improved body esteem and 60% had improved their behaviour and well-being.

(iv) I have been informed that information on its cost effectiveness is not available at this time.

7 Given that the effectiveness of the Motivate Programme has already been established, for the rationale behind the decision to introduce the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme, which has similar aims.

The Trust has informed me that the Fun, Food and Fitness program was piloted to incorporate the most up to date weight management evidence into current dietetic practice. The program contains a family based approach for adults and children with 3 strands: one-to-one dietetic consultations, Cook-It and a physical activity component, provided in partnership with the local councils. A family based approach was taken to improve and help sustain behavioural change in the longer term for both the adults and children involved.

Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

(AQW 26507/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need – is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCT area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

- (i) Motivate was evaluated in terms of effectiveness of the primary endpoint of the pilot (weight loss), clinical outcomes and objective indices of cardiovascular health, objective mental health outcomes and cost effectiveness through use of healthcare resources and pharmacological treatments.
- (ii) Given the small numbers that have been involved in the Fun, Food and Fitness programme, it would not be appropriate to comment on its effectiveness at this stage.

5 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Motivate Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

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- (ii) Patients who completed 3 months of the program lost on average 3% of their body weight; patients who completed 6 months of the program lost on average 6% of their body weight; 50% of patients who completed 6 months of the program were followed up on average 10 months post completion, these patients continued to lose weight, average weight loss at 10 months was 7%.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: positive changes to biochemical markers after 6 months; improved general cardiac health, reduction in anxiety & depression levels; and improved quality of life which included vitality, physical role functioning, mental health and overall general health.

- (iv) Economic evaluation of the program was carried out by health economists and reviewed by the NHSCF finance team independent of the Motivate team. The cost-effectiveness of this programme is currently being considered.

6 (i) how many patients have taken part in the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme to date; (ii) for an overview of the weight lost by the participants; (iii) what additional benefits the participants encountered; and (iv) for his assessment of the cost effectiveness of the programme.

- (i) The pilot program for adults has been evaluated and indicates that 8 adults were invited, 6 attended, and 2 discharged. The children's programme enrolled 24 participants.
- (ii) The 6 who completed the adult programme averaged a 5.67% weight loss and a 5.53% reduction in BMI. Of the 4 from this pilot who attended the final group evaluation session results indicated an average weight loss of 8.64% and an 8.59% reduction in BMI. Of the 24 who enrolled for the children's (4-16 years) programme average weight loss at 3 months was 2.38kg. At the 6 month review, 50% demonstrated a reduction in BMI and around one third demonstrated weight loss. Of the children who had waist circumference measured at 6 months, around four fifths had a reduction and over 10% had maintained their baseline waist circumference.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: nutrition questionnaire indicated 70% maintained or improved eating habits, 43% demonstrated increase in physical activity levels, 44.4% children reported improved body esteem and 60% had improved their behaviour and well-being.
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7 Given that the effectiveness of the Motivate Programme has already been established, for the rationale behind the decision to introduce the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme, which has similar aims.

The Trust has informed me that the Fun, Food and Fitness program was piloted to incorporate the most up to date weight management evidence into current dietetic practice. The program contains a family based approach for adults and children with 3 strands: one-to-one dietetic consultations, Cook-It and a physical activity component, provided in partnership with the local councils. A family based approach was taken to improve and help sustain behavioural change in the longer term for both the adults and children involved.

Fun, Food and Fitness

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the effectiveness of the Motivate Programme has already been established, for the rationale behind the decision to introduce the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme, which has similar aims.

(AQW 26508/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given that the questions all relate to the same issue I have grouped the answers together for convenience and ease of reading.

I should state at the beginning that it is my Department's responsibility to set the strategic direction and policy in relation to work to prevent and address obesity. The commissioning of individual services and projects to deliver on this policy – in line with the evidence base and local need - is the responsibility of the broader Health and Social Care Family.

1 Whether the Motivate programme is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The Motivate Program is not currently available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCF) area.

2 In light of the Public Health Agency's intention to roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme when evidence of effectiveness is established, when this evidence will be available; and why the Motivate Programme is not open for referrals and is not being rolled out

I have been informed that, at this stage, the Public Health Agency has no plans to fund or roll-out the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme in the NHSCF area. The last Motivate group session finished in December 2011 and during 2013/14 the PHA intends to undertake a review of adult weight management programmes in Northern Ireland. This will include a review of the global evidence base and a scoping exercise of the range of programmes available in Northern Ireland. The review will inform the development of a regional strategic direction for future commissioning in this area, ensuring that the PHA and HSCB commission evidence based programmes that are cost effective and deliver appropriate outcomes for the population.

3 How people in East Londonderry can access the Motivate Programme

The Motivate is not open for referrals, therefore there is no access to this initiative for people of East Londonderry.

4 Outline the evaluation that has taken place of the (i) Motivate Programme; and (ii) Fun, Food and Fitness Programme; and what evidence of effectiveness these evaluations have produced.

- (i) Motivate was evaluated in terms of effectiveness of the primary endpoint of the pilot (weight loss), clinical outcomes and objective indices of cardiovascular health, objective mental health outcomes and cost effectiveness through use of healthcare resources and pharmacological treatments.
- (ii) Given the small numbers that have been involved in the Fun, Food and Fitness programme, it would not be appropriate to comment on its effectiveness at this stage.

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- (ii) Patients who completed 3 months of the program lost on average 3% of their body weight; patients who completed 6 months of the program lost on average 6% of their body weight; 50% of patients who completed 6 months of the program were followed up on average 10 months post completion, these patients continued to lose weight, average weight loss at 10 months was 7%.
- (iii) Additional benefits participants encountered included: positive changes to biochemical markers after 6 months; improved general cardiac health, reduction in anxiety & depression levels; and improved quality of life which included vitality, physical role functioning, mental health and overall general health.
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- (iv) I have been informed that information on its cost effectiveness is not available at this time.

7 Given that the effectiveness of the Motivate Programme has already been established, for the rationale behind the decision to introduce the Fun, Food and Fitness Programme, which has similar aims.

The Trust has informed me that the Fun, Food and Fitness program was piloted to incorporate the most up to date weight management evidence into current dietetic practice. The program contains a family based approach for adults and children with 3 strands: one-to-one dietetic consultations, Cook-It and a physical activity component, provided in partnership with the local councils. A family based approach was taken to improve and help sustain behavioural change in the longer term for both the adults and children involved.

Nurses: Whistle-blowing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he meant by 'protection' when he called on nurses to whistle-blow in March 2012.

(AQW 26512/11-15)

Mr Poots: "Your Right to Whistle Blow", dated 22 March 2012, was addressed to all HSC staff and was not confined to nurses. The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (revised 2004) provides staff with protection, against victimisation, when reporting concerns reasonably and in good faith.

Circular HSC AfC 4/2010 asked employers to review their local policies to ensure that they emphasise that it is safe and acceptable for staff to raise concerns and to set out clear arrangements for doing so. A copy is available at: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-afc-2010-04-amendment-no19.pdf>. Whistleblowing policies have been in place in all Arms Length Bodies prior to my correspondence dated 22 March 2013.

Since March 2012, my Department has been made aware of 17 potential whistleblowing cases. When considered against the provisions set out in the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 only 7 fell within the definition of whistleblowing. None were referred to the Ombudsman.

Nurses: Whistle-blowing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures were taken to ensure an open and transparent whistleblowing system was in place to protect whistle-blowers, prior to his 'invitation to whistle blow' in March 2012. (AQW 26513/11-15)

Mr Poots: "Your Right to Whistle Blow", dated 22 March 2012, was addressed to all HSC staff and was not confined to nurses. The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (revised 2004) provides staff with protection, against victimisation, when reporting concerns reasonably and in good faith.

Circular HSC AfC 4/2010 asked employers to review their local policies to ensure that they emphasise that it is safe and acceptable for staff to raise concerns and to set out clear arrangements for doing so. A copy is available at: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-afc-2010-04-amendment-no19.pdf>. Whistleblowing policies have been in place in all arm's-length bodies prior to my correspondence dated 22 March 2013.

Since March 2012, my Department has been made aware of 17 potential whistleblowing cases. When considered against the provisions set out in the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 only 7 fell within the definition of whistleblowing. None were referred to the Ombudsman.

Nurses: Whistle-blowing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many whistle-blowers have come to the attention of the Department since March 2012; and how many were referred to the Ombudsman. (AQW 26514/11-15)

Mr Poots: "Your Right to Whistle Blow", dated 22 March 2012, was addressed to all HSC staff and was not confined to nurses. The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (revised 2004) provides staff with protection, against victimisation, when reporting concerns reasonably and in good faith.

Circular HSC AfC 4/2010 asked employers to review their local policies to ensure that they emphasise that it is safe and acceptable for staff to raise concerns and to set out clear arrangements for doing so. A copy is available at: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-afc-2010-04-amendment-no19.pdf>. Whistleblowing policies have been in place in all Arms Length Bodies prior to my correspondence dated 22 March 2013.

Since March 2012, my Department has been made aware of 17 potential whistleblowing cases. When considered against the provisions set out in the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 only 7 fell within the definition of whistleblowing. None were referred to the Ombudsman.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many individual complaints have been investigated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in the last twelve months. (AQW 26515/11-15)

Mr Poots: The investigation of complaints within the health and social care sector regulated by RQIA are the responsibility of the provider. RQIA, however, has a statutory duty to require such providers to establish a complaints procedure, which is to be made known to every user or patient and to require the provider to ensure that a record of each complaint is maintained. Any complaint made under the procedure must be fully investigated by the provider.

Protection of Vulnerable Adults

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the joint-protocols with the PSNI that effectively allow Health and Social Care Trusts to police themselves, who is ultimately responsible for this policing process. (AQW 26516/11-15)

Mr Poots: The decision whether or not to refer cases of alleged or suspected abuse of vulnerable adults to the PSNI is a professional decision taken by a HSC Trust Adult Protection Designated Officer (Designated Officer). The Designated Officer must act in accordance with the 'Protocol for Joint Investigation of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Vulnerable Adults' (Joint Protocol), which provides a framework within which staff exercise their professional judgement and discharge their legal responsibility.

Checking the appropriateness of referral decisions can occur at a number of levels. At an operational level, where it is considered appropriate, an adult safeguarding referral to social services is discussed with the PSNI to determine whether it should be progressed under the Joint Protocol. Adult Safeguarding Specialists, who are senior staff within each HSC Trust, check samples of adult safeguarding referrals, including referrals that are screened out of the safeguarding process.

Other mechanisms which help to give assurance that HSC Trusts are making the correct decisions for referrals to the PSNI are: monitoring of monthly statistical returns received by the Health and Social Care Board from each HSC Trust showing the number nature and type of referrals to adult safeguarding services; inspections by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) of regulated services; Delegated Statutory Function Reports and related quarterly monitoring meetings; and reports by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI).

In May 2011 a joint review of the Joint Protocol was initiated by the RQIA and CJINI. The Review report found that in all five HSC Trusts there were clear lines of management accountability and professional responsibility for services provided to vulnerable adults from front line staff through to the chief executive and the HSC Trust board. In reviewing the implementation and overall delivery of the Protocol across the five HSC Trusts, the review team found that the adult protection services were responsive to allegations of abuse to vulnerable adults, whilst conforming to the regulations, policies and procedures.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the waiting times for patients to receive continuous positive airway pressure equipment through the Health Service.

(AQW 26519/11-15)

Mr Poots: Waiting times for CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) treatment in each of the five Trusts is given in the table below.

Health and Social Care Trust	Waiting Time
Belfast and Northern	6 Months
South Eastern	17 Months
Southern	3 weeks
Western	6 - 8 weeks

The Health and Social Care Board has acknowledged the difficulties in this service area and is undertaking a regional scoping exercise to gauge need against the current service provision. It is expected that this exercise will be completed in October 2013 and this will inform the Board's future commissioning arrangements for this service. The Board is currently working to put interim arrangements in place in 2013/14 with Trusts to deal with the current waiting lists for limited sleep studies and to enhance the access to CPAP equipment.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the waiting times for continuous positive airway pressure equipment are in keeping with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

(AQW 26520/11-15)

Mr Poots: In March 2008, NICE published TA139 on Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) for the treatment of obstructive sleep apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome. TA139 was reviewed by the Department and endorsed as applicable in Northern Ireland in October 2008.

TA139 does not specify a waiting time target.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether patients are receiving timely and equitable access to continuous positive airway pressure treatment, review and follow-up at Health and Social Care Trust level, as stated in the overarching standard 31 of the Service Framework for Respiratory Health and Wellbeing.

(AQW 26524/11-15)

Mr Poots: I will answer these three questions together.

A number of Health and Social Care Trusts are experiencing significant pressures associated with the provision of sleep apnoea services and access to CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), which has responsibility for commissioning health care services in Northern Ireland, acknowledges the difficulties in this service area and is undertaking a regional scoping exercise to gauge need against the current service provision. It is expected that this exercise will be completed in October 2013 and this will inform the Board's future commissioning arrangements for this service. The Trusts are working closely with the HSCB to identify the staffing and infrastructure requirements required to enable them to reduce the waiting times for CPAP.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to reduce the waiting times for access to continuous positive airway pressure equipment.

(AQW 26525/11-15)

Mr Poots: I will answer these three questions together.

A number of Health and Social Care Trusts are experiencing significant pressures associated with the provision of sleep apnoea services and access to CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), which has responsibility for commissioning health care services in Northern Ireland, acknowledges the difficulties in this service area and is undertaking a regional scoping exercise to gauge need against the current service provision. It is expected that this exercise will be completed in October 2013 and this will inform the Board's future commissioning arrangements for this service. The Trusts are working closely with the HSCB to identify the staffing and infrastructure requirements required to enable them to reduce the waiting times for CPAP.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to assist patients who have currently been on the waiting list for continuous positive airway pressure equipment for more than 18 months.

(AQW 26526/11-15)

Mr Poots: I will answer these three questions together.

A number of Health and Social Care Trusts are experiencing significant pressures associated with the provision of sleep apnoea services and access to CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), which has responsibility for commissioning health care services in Northern Ireland, acknowledges the difficulties in this service area and is undertaking a regional scoping exercise to gauge need against the current service provision. It is expected that this exercise will be completed in October 2013 and this will inform the Board's future commissioning arrangements for this service. The Trusts are working closely with the HSCB to identify the staffing and infrastructure requirements required to enable them to reduce the waiting times for CPAP.

Multiple Sclerosis: Advice Line

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many calls to the Multiple Sclerosis Advice Line have been received in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26528/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on number of calls to the "Multiple Sclerosis Advice Line" is not available from the Department.

Multiple Sclerosis: Advice Line

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department provides to the Multiple Sclerosis Advice Line.

(AQW 26529/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not provide such funding.

Anti-psychotic Drugs: Prisoners

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on the removal of anti-psychotic drugs from a prisoner.

(AQW 26562/11-15)

Mr Poots: An antipsychotic drug such as Quetiapine which is on the South East Trust's list of abusable medications may be discontinued under the Trust's 'In-Possession Medication' policy if a prisoner fails a spot-check.

A failed spot-check indicates that the prisoner has not been taking his medication correctly and as such it will have been of no therapeutic benefit to him/her and therefore the prisoner has effectively self-discontinued his/her medication. All prisoners sign a 'Prisoner Medication Contract' on committal which clearly informs them of the consequences of abusing/trading certain medications.

A decision to discontinue antipsychotic medication would be made in conjunction with the Mental Health team in the Trust.

Maghaberry Prison: Healthcare Officers

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of health officers at Maghaberry Prison; and (ii) the ratio of health officers to prisoners.

(AQW 26563/11-15)

Mr Poots: Healthcare officer posts were in place prior to the transfer of staff from the Northern Ireland Prison Service to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in April 2012.

Currently there are no healthcare officers remaining in the prison healthcare system as these posts have been replaced following the appointment, by the South Eastern Trust, of a new multi-disciplinary healthcare team. The new healthcare team includes General Practitioners, Psychiatrists, Primary Care Nurses, Mental Health Nurses, Specialist Practitioners, Forensic Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists and Allied Health Professionals.

As your question refers to healthcare officers and there are no healthcare officers remaining in the prison healthcare system it is not possible to provide the information you require.

Liverpool Pathway

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the publication of the recommendations within the More Care Less Pathway: Review of the Liverpool Care Pathway report in July 2013, whether any Health and Social Care Trusts receive incentive payments when patients are placed on the Liverpool pathway; and if so, how much has been paid to each of the Trusts since the introduction of incentive payments.

(AQW 26586/11-15)

Mr Poots: No Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland receives incentive payments when patients are placed on the Liverpool Care Pathway.

Osteogenesis Imperfecta

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26608/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of people diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta.

Osteogenesis Imperfecta

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the treatment and support available to (i) children; and (ii) adults diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta.

(AQW 26609/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) provides a regional service for children diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta (OI); specialist support is also provided by the Sheffield Children's Hospital. Treatment and support is dependent on assessed need and may include intravenous bisphosphonates, as well as support from a wider multidisciplinary team including nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, endocrinology, nutrition, dietetics, orthopaedics and nursing.

Treatment and support for adults with OI includes bisphosphonate therapy, orthopaedics, physiotherapy and occupational therapy as necessary.

Support and genetic counselling to people and families affected by OI is provided by the Northern Ireland Regional Genetics Service at the Belfast City Hospital.

Domiciliary Care

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to increase funding for domiciliary care.

(AQW 26610/11-15)

Mr Poots: Within the context of Home as the Hub, as identified in Transforming Your Care, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has advised that additional investment of £3.7m in domiciliary care services is planned in 2013/2014.

Going forward, the HSCB is continuing to assess the impact of reablement services on future demand for domiciliary care services with a view to establishing future budget needs

Fall Prevention

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the benefits of investing in falls prevention nurses.

(AQW 26628/11-15)

Mr Poots: Current best practice guidance (NICE Clinical Guidelines) issued by my department, to HSC Trusts, indicates that a multi professional and multi factorial approach to both assessing the risk of falls and the interventions to prevention of harm from falls should be conducted by a multi professional team of healthcare professionals.

The success of a falls prevention programme is maximised by multidisciplinary team working, therefore assessment of the benefit should be based on the contribution of the whole team and not the contribution of individuals.

Nurses have a key role to play and work is being undertaken to introduce the nursing component of the Fallsafe Bundle, a tool to assess and minimise the risk of inpatient falls. This will be taken forward in all adult inpatient hospital areas.

Care Pathway for Stroke Patients

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research or audit work his Department has carried out into the use of Service Improvement Providers to oversee the care pathway of stroke patients.

(AQW 26629/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not carried out any research or audit work into the use of Service Improvement Providers to oversee the care pathway of stroke patients.

I have been advised by the Health and Social Care Board that one Trust has appointed a Service Improvement Coordinator and the 4 remaining Trusts are exploring the potential to appoint time limited (2 years) Service Improvement Coordinator posts.

Pinewood Residential Care Home, Ballymena

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) respite; and (ii) intermediate residents in Pinewood Residential Care Home, Ballymena have requested, and been refused, permanent residency in this calendar year.

(AQW 26648/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Trust has advised that information regarding requests for a permanent residential care placement in any of the Trust's statutory homes is not routinely collected.

The Trust has advised that a small number of people (single figures) had requested a permanent place in the home during the calendar year.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin will be completed; and how many patients will benefit from using the facility in its first full year of operation.

(AQW 26700/11-15)

Mr Poots: The construction of the Radiotherapy Unit at the Altnagelvin Hospital site is planned to be completed by the end of 2015. Installation will take place during this time, and an intensive period of commissioning will then commence. It is planned that the Unit will be in operation by mid 2016.

In its first full calendar year, with three linear accelerators in operation, the Radiotherapy Unit is expected to have the capacity to treat approximately 1500 patients per year.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Barnardo's Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 26052/11-15, when contact was first made with the PSNI concerning the content of the Barnardo's report; and who made contact.

(AQW 26749/11-15)

Mr Poots: As stated in my response to AQW 26052/11-15, my officials agreed with Barnardo's staff that the recommendations contained within the report would be brought to the attention of those agencies/bodies at whom they were directed and in advance of the publication of the report.

A representative from the PSNI was a member of the Advisory Group for the Barnardo's Not a World Away research. This advisory group met between September 2009 and August 2011.

Sport: Corrective Lenses

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the proven benefits for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of children and young people from playing sports, what provisions are in place to assist young people who require corrective lenses and who cannot afford specialised glasses for sports.

(AQW 26758/11-15)

Mr Poots: Provision is not made within the current regulatory framework for the provision of specialised corrective eyewear for sport.

Where a 'specialised' corrective optical appliance is required for reasons of special facial characteristics or for medical therapy, the Health and Social Care Board give individual consideration to these cases.

Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department has improved the health of the people in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 26799/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency has been working closely with key stakeholders in this area for the past three years to both improve the overall health and wellbeing of the population and address health inequalities.

Significant PHA investment has been identified and provided to the community to allow it to build capacity and empower its residents to take control over, and responsibility for, their own health and social wellbeing. This investment has enabled the Estate to undertake a number of initiatives which have had an immediate impact on short term health outcomes and are, importantly, expected to yield significant improvements in longer-term health outcomes.

A consultation carried out earlier this year has informed the development of a Kilcooley Health Development Action Plan. Progress towards its implementation will be monitored by the Kilcooley Health Task Force.

Macular Degeneration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are receiving treatment for macular degeneration.

(AQW 26805/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of people receiving treatment for macular degeneration.

In 2012/13, there were 632 admissions to HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of macular degeneration. This equated to approximately 531 individuals.

Ombudsman: Implementation of Recommendations

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures and follow up exist to ensure that recommendations from the Ombudsman, when upholding a complaint in respect of the standard of care in a Health Service facility or administrative failures therein, are adequately acted upon; and whether his Department monitors such matters.

(AQW 26815/11-15)

Mr Poots: All investigations by the Ombudsman are conducted in private. The Ombudsman has no general powers to share information publicly. (Articles 12(3) and 21 of the Commissioner for Complaints (NI) Order 1996 refer).

My Department, therefore, does not receive copies of the Ombudsman's Investigation reports. These are strictly confidential and are only shared by the Ombudsman with those individuals/organisations concerned.

The power of the Ombudsman does not extend to enforcing any recommendations made following an investigation if these are not implemented.

Vulnerable Patients

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what advocacy procedures exist in Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that there is adequate communication between clinicians and the families of elderly, confused or vulnerable patients.

(AQW 26818/11-15)

Mr Poots: Communication skills are intrinsic to the training of all clinical and professional staff groups working in the Health and Social Care service, and the codes of practice for many also include a requirement to advocate on behalf of their patient or client when required. To this end procedures for communication and providing information are contained within the operational policies of every service area.

Independent advocacy for vulnerable individuals and their families is available via a range of services across the province including specialist services for; older people with dementia; people with functional mental illness; people with physical disability or sensory impairment; and people with learning disability (of all ages), amongst others.

Advocacy specifically for family carers is included in most of the carer support programmes available in all areas alongside other supports such as information, training, respite and peer support services.

Vulnerable Adults: Safety Regulation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what regulation is in place to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable adults with a learning disability who take part in work placements or day opportunities, which are co-ordinated but not operated by Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 26824/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been considerable development of safeguarding vulnerable adults' policies, procedures and practice in recent years. Processes for adults with learning disabilities are regularly monitored by the NI Adult Safeguarding Partnership and apply in all settings, whether operated by the HSC or other provider. In addition, clients in work placements are subject to other safeguards such as those set out in the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and in general health and safety legislation applicable to everyone, and this includes liability.

Protection plans, completed assessments, care plans, risk assessments, occupational therapy workability and travel assessments must be in place before any placement begins. Providers will then have a day to day 'work plan' based on the client's needs, as identified in their care plan. Trusts will also have a formal contract with the provider which covers all the legal issues. All staff working with Vulnerable Adults must be screened by Access NI prior to starting any work with individuals.

In addition, work placements are monitored by Community Access Officers whose role is to personalise the placement to meet the individual's needs. Clients availing of day opportunities are also required to have these multi-disciplinary assessments in place before commencement. Providers of work placements and day opportunities are also offered support and information about learning disability and each client's needs.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what walk-in genito-urinary medicine services are available in Belfast; and what such services are available on an emergency basis.

(AQW 26835/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no routine walk-in service at the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust's genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic; however, there is still a facility for emergency appointments. Cases of emergency are seen as walk-in after triage, but this is typically only a small number of patients.

The Belfast HSC Trust has assured me that that the introduction of an appointment system has not had a negative impact on encouraging the public to seek treatment; it has however facilitated better management of appointments and patient care. Previously, patients would arrive at GUM clinics from 4.00am onwards in the hope of being seen when the clinic opened at 8.30am or 9.00am, and clinics were always overbooked by 6.00am.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Belfast Service

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current genito-urinary medicine clinic in Belfast, including what impact the move to an appointment only service has had on encouraging the public to seek treatment.

(AQW 26836/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no routine walk-in service at the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust's genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic; however, there is still a facility for emergency appointments. Cases of emergency are seen as walk-in after triage, but this is typically only a small number of patients.

The Belfast HSC Trust has assured me that that the introduction of an appointment system has not had a negative impact on encouraging the public to seek treatment; it has however facilitated better management of appointments and patient care. Previously, patients would arrive at GUM clinics from 4.00am onwards in the hope of being seen when the clinic opened at 8.30am or 9.00am, and clinics were always overbooked by 6.00am.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Belfast Consultants

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department plans to temporarily fill the consultant roles at the genito-urinary medicine clinic in Belfast, that have been vacated because of maternity leave.

(AQW 26837/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am aware there are two vacant consultant posts in the genito-urinary medicine (GUM) service at Belfast HSC Trust caused by maternity leave. The Trust has assured me that it has been making every effort to fill these vacancies. The Trust first advertised in May for two locum consultant posts. One applicant attended interview and was offered the post, however they later declined the offer of appointment due to accepting a permanent post elsewhere. I understand they subsequently agreed to accept the post for 4-7 weeks starting in October. The Trust re-advertised the post in July but unfortunately this did not generate any applicants.

The Trust has advised that all clinics are currently being delivered by the consultant in post.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Belfast Appointments

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what mechanisms will be put in place to overcome the difficulties that exist in arranging an appointment by telephone at the Belfast genito-urinary medicine clinic.

(AQW 26838/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust recognise that due to the high volume of calls, patients may experience difficulties when attempting to contact the genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic by telephone. The management team at the clinic has been working with the service provider in an attempt to make the phone system more effective and efficient, including advising patients where they are in the queue.

The GUM service has also recently appointed a quality and data manager who will be able to identify and resolve ongoing problems more quickly.

Pinewood Residential Care Home

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide the findings, that relate to Pinewood Residential Care home, of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's consultation on the provision of the Trusts residential homes for older people which closed in March 2009.

(AQW 26844/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Trust's analysis of responses to CSR Reform and Modernisation proposals, which included those stemming from its consultation on Reprovision of the Trust's Residential Homes for Older People, is available via the following link: http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/CSR_reform_and_modernisation_proposals_consultations_findings.pdf

It should be noted, however, that the analysis makes no specific reference to Pinewood Residential Home as Pinewood was not proposed for closure in the Trust's consultation report.

GP Appointments: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average (i) GP to patient ratio; and (ii) waiting time for an appointment with a GP, in the South Antrim constituency.

(AQW 26845/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit in the HSC Business Services Organisation show that as at July 2013, the average GP to patient ratio was 1:

- (i) 1672 for South Antrim Westminster Parliamentary Constituency (WPC) area.

The ratio was calculated using the headcount of principal and salaried GPs working at practices located in South Antrim WPC, as whole time equivalent figures are not available. Locums were not included.

The patient population used in the calculation was the number of patients registered with practices located within South Antrim WPC; it should be noted that patients may not reside in the WPC in which they are registered.

- (ii) The information requested is not available.

Antrim Area Hospital: Improvements

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any further modernisations or improvements to be carried out at the Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 26846/11-15)

Mr Poots: The new emergency department and 24 bedded ward at Antrim Area Hospital have just been completed and work is currently ongoing on the site to extend and refurbish the Neonatal Unit and create a new Dentistry Department. In addition there are a number of minor improvements underway.

The Northern Trust is developing business cases for a replacement MRI scanner at the hospital as well as an additional MRI scanner at Antrim Area Hospital. There are also plans to enhance the breast imaging service accommodation.

The Trust is developing plans for a second phase of redevelopment at Antrim Hospital. A business case is currently being developed and it is expected that the next stage of redevelopment will include new day surgery theatres and supporting accommodation, endoscopy suites, children's inpatient unit as well as an ambulatory and outpatient unit.

These further developments are subject to budgetary availability and business case approval and will be considered alongside other priorities across the region in light of the available budget.

Slieve Roe Residential Home, Kilkeel

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the last consultation on Slieve Roe Residential Home, Kilkeel was completed; and what were the conclusions of this consultation.

(AQW 26847/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Trust has advised that within the last CSR period 2008-2011, the Trust undertook to review the provision of Statutory Residential Care across the Southern area. This process resulted in a public consultation proposal to close both Slieve Roe House and Skeagh House. The public consultation period commenced on 15 December 2008 and concluded on Friday, 6th March 2009.

Following analysis of the consultation responses to the proposed changes the Trust put forward an alternative service model within its Consultation Outcome Report that proposed retaining all the current statutory residential homes albeit with reduced number of permanent placements. This was agreed at the Trust Board meeting on 26th March 2009 and subsequently implemented.

Slieve Roe Residential Home, Kilkeel

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many requests for admission to Slieve Roe Residential Home, Kilkeel were received during (i) 2011/12; and (ii) 2012/13; and how many people were admitted during these periods.

(AQW 26848/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available centrally and was therefore requested from the Southern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response can be found below.

Table 1: Occupancy in Slieve Roe Residential Home at 31 March.

	Admissions	Available Permanent Places	No. of Permanent Residents
2011/12	2	12	12
2012/13	1	12	10

Table 2: Respite Admissions to Slieve Roe Residential Home

	Admissions	Occupancy
2011/12	36	57%
2012/13	32	51%

Information regarding requests for admission to residential care homes is not routinely collected by the Southern HSC Trust.

Causeway Hospital

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions have taken place to explore the future of the Causeway Hospital as part of the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 26881/11-15)

Mr Poots: Further to the information provided in response to your earlier Assembly Question AQW 22121, I can advise that work has been ongoing at the Northern Trust to take forward the implementation of the Turnaround Improvement Plan. A key element of that work is a series of service reviews, including networking of clinical services, and development of a new model for medical leadership and management. These processes should provide the Trust the opportunity to embed necessary change and reform. I am advised that it is the view of the Turnaround and Support Team that an appraisal on future management options should be informed by this work and therefore should follow on from it. This view is shared by the Trust. Accordingly, I am of the view that these processes should be substantially in place before further work is carried out on the options appraisal on management arrangements.

There have been no further discussions to date between the Western Health and Social Care Trust, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, the Health and Social care Board or my Department to explore the future of the Causeway Hospital as part of the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

Dialysis

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many local patients are undergoing dialysis in each (i) Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) jurisdiction outside Northern Ireland.

(AQW 26889/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- i) The number of local patients who received dialysis in each Health and Social Care Trust during 2012/13 is given in the table below.

HSC Trust	Number of local patients receiving dialysis
Belfast	328
Northern	144
South Eastern	168
Southern	155
Western	137
Total	932

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

- ii) Local patients who require dialysis and receive treatment temporarily under the jurisdiction outside of Northern Ireland are also referred to as 'holiday dialysis' patients. During 2012/13, there were 133 local patients who received dialysis under the jurisdiction outside Northern Ireland.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Public Consultations

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the public consultations to which each Health and Social Care Trust has responded in the last three years.

(AQW 26890/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts respond to a wide range of consultations, however all this information is not available in the format requested and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Sexual Assault of Looked-after Children: NHSCT

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many investigations his Department or any organisations under the remit of his Department, have undertaken, in the past 18 months, into the sexual assault of looked-after children who were accommodated in a hotel, guest house or other likewise private accommodation by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) to detail the outcome of each investigation; and (iii) to detail the policies that relate to the accommodation of looked-after children in private accommodation that include hotels, guests houses and likewise establishments.

(AQW 26908/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) There have been three investigations at two establishments into the sexual assault of looked-after children accommodated in private accommodation by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in the past 18 months. One young person has since withdrawn their statement.
- (ii) PSNI investigations are ongoing into these incidents.
- (iii) The Children (NI) Order 1995 specifies the living arrangements in which looked-after children can be placed and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 requires Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure the "suitability" of accommodation that young people leaving care move into. Currently there are eleven young people's supported accommodation projects operational across the region and a further eight are identified for development over the next three years. All such projects must comply with DHSSPS Standards on Young Adults Supported Accommodation and are subject to inspection by RQIA and contract monitoring by Supporting People. In addition, a new model of young people supported living known as 'supported lodgings' is being piloted in the Northern and Western Trust areas in recognition of the limited supported and suitable accommodation available to young people in the Northern Trust area in particular. A further set of standards are being developed to underpin this model.

Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will order a review of the Regional Brain Injury Unit at Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast, given the concerns raised by the families of patients.

(AQW 26909/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department launched its Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Action Plan in July 2010 and subsequently a Regional Acquired Brain Injury Implementation Group (RABIIG) was established to take forward its implementation.

Considerable progress was made for example with the development of Brain Injury Standards and Care Pathways for children and adults. The Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit (RABIU), ABI patients and their families and carers were also fully involved in this process which completed in 2012.

Should any specific concerns about patient care in RABIU be brought to my attention, I would of course be happy to examine these.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Belfast Appointments

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 22980/11-15, for an update on the number of requests per week the Genitourinary Medicine clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, receives for appointments; and how many appointment slots the clinic offers per week.

(AQW 26910/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that their response remains unchanged from that given in AQW 22980/11-15:

At maximum capacity, there are two hundred appointment slots available per week at the Genitourinary Medicine clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital. There are approximately 1,800 telephone calls into the unit per week, though it is not possible to ascertain how many of these are actual appointment requests or calls of another nature, such as queries. The Belfast Trust

has advised that they are working with BT to develop a system to ascertain the nature of calls and how many are actioned and answered.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of tests for (i) Chlamydia trachomatis; (ii) Neisseria gonorrhoea; (iii) Treponema pallidum; (iv) Herpes Simplex Virus I; and (v) Herpes Simplex Virus II have been positive in the last two years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 26911/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the percentage of positive tests for (i) Chlamydia trachomatis; (ii) Neisseria gonorrhoea; (iii) Treponema pallidum; (iv) Herpes Simplex Virus I; and (v) Herpes Simplex Virus II, is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, information on the number of new episodes of selected sexually transmitted infections (STI's) are published by the Public Health Authority, and available to view or download from the link below:

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/health-protection/sexually-transmitted-infections>

Independent Advocates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what vetting procedures are in place to ensure that independent advocates appointed by Health and Social Care Trusts are, and remain, independent.

(AQW 26925/11-15)

Mr Poots: In May 2012, my Department published Developing Advocacy Services – A Guide for Commissioners. Within the Guide, independence is one of the key principles and standards that advocacy services commissioned by the Trusts must now adhere to.

Advocates recruited by Trusts are vetted, trained, managed and supervised in accordance with their role and function. Monitoring and supporting them to ensure that they can remain independent is an intrinsic element of their training and supervision. Any concerns about partiality or inappropriateness are addressed through normal Trust governance and contract monitoring arrangements.

Respite Facility for Ex-service Personnel

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any plans his Department has for a respite facility for ex-service personnel.

(AQW 26928/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has no plans to provide a respite facility for ex-service personnel. Ex service personnel have equal access to statutory Primary and Secondary Care services as the rest of the population, underpinned by my Department's protocol for delivering health and social care services to members of the armed forces, their families and veterans.

The Armed Forces Liaison Forum, which my Department chairs, provides a forum for departmental officials, the HSC, representatives from the Defence Medical Services and veterans' organisations to discuss health and social care issues of mutual interest.

Abortion: Draft Guidelines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many responses his Department received to the consultation on draft abortion guidelines.

(AQW 26965/11-15)

Mr Poots: Eighty six responses were received to the public consultation exercise on the termination of pregnancy draft guidance which closed on the 29 July 2013.

My officials are currently assessing the responses and I expect to receive advice shortly.

Abortion: Guidelines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will publish guidelines on abortion.

(AQW 26966/11-15)

Mr Poots: I cannot confirm a date for publication of guidance at this time. Officials are currently considering the responses received to the consultation exercise and will amend the draft guidance as required. The Northern Ireland Executive will then consider the revised document before publication. The current draft has no status until this process is complete.

Domiciliary Care

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust has spent on domiciliary care in each of the last five years; and how many people have received domiciliary care from each Health and Social Care Trust during this period.

(AQW 26975/11-15)

Mr Poots: Domiciliary Care expenditure is collected annually via the Trust Financial Returns. The following cost information is the latest available:

	Belfast £	Northern £	South Eastern £	Southern £	Western £	Total Expenditure £
2011-12	48,595,407	44,751,363	43,648,118	44,198,959	30,122,041	211,315,889
2010-11	46,290,460	43,464,498	40,497,428	43,968,120	28,798,256	203,018,761
2009-10	44,334,169	40,884,227	40,415,202	43,879,485	30,512,322	200,025,405
2008-09	43,217,822	37,242,782	36,212,243	39,889,216	29,067,596	185,629,659
2007-08	40,454,745	35,038,761	33,857,305	34,697,556	26,649,853	170,698,220

The number of people receiving domiciliary care in NI is counted annually over a single week in September. The following are the numbers of people recorded as being in receipt of domiciliary care during the survey week over the last 5 years, broken down by Trust:

HSC Trust	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Belfast	6,297	6,214	6,427	6,454	6,363
Northern	4,143	4,052	4,164	4,231	4,623
South Eastern	4,278	3,908	3,954	4,169	4,544
Southern	4,685	4,462	4,331	4,219	4,389
Western	3,657	4,741	4,513	4,449	4,215
Northern Ireland	23,060	23,377	23,389	23,522	24,134

Source: Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland

Abortion: Guidelines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he would consider altering guidelines to allow pregnant women, with a foetus diagnosed with anencephaly, to seek a termination.

(AQW 26978/11-15)

Mr Poots: The draft guidance document cannot change the law in relation to the grounds for a termination of pregnancy. Guidance can only reflect the legal position as it has been interpreted by the courts.

Any change to criminal law is a matter for the Department of Justice, the Executive and the Assembly.

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's performance against the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women.

(AQW 26984/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 17 July 2013, the United Nations Committee that oversees the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) formally examined the UK's performance in terms of its CEDAW obligations. The Committee was provided updates on the progress made in key areas details of which are available on the CEDAW website. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws55.htm>

The CEDAW Committee has published its Concluding Observations based on the Examination of the UK. Many of the recommendations are general and not specific to Northern Ireland. However, recommendations relating to abortion law and equal access to reproductive treatment are specific to Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

OFMdfM has overarching responsibility for ensuring that CEDAW is implemented here. CEDAW is implemented via the Gender Equality Strategy, which is currently under review. OFMdfM is working in conjunction with Departments to develop an action plan to deliver the objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy and the recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee will be considered as part of this process.

Respite: Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of respite care beds in (i) Pinewood Residential Care Home; and (ii) the Ballymena Area and their location; and to outline the plans to increase provision.

(AQW 26992/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern HSC Trust has advised that there are currently 5 respite beds available in Pinewood Residential Care Home. Respite is provided in a number of nursing and residential beds across the Ballymena Area. The list below details the homes used by the Trust to provide additional respite beds when the need arises.

Andena 206-208 Ballymoney Road Ballymena	Carn-vaddy 15 Doctors Road Ballymena	Innisfree 110 Buckna Road Broughshane	Redford 15 Redford Road Cullybackey
Braefield 2-6 Carncomb Road Connor, Ballymena	Craigdun 30 Dunminning Road Cullybackey	Kintullagh House 36 Westbourne Avenue Carniny Road, Ballymena	Rose Martha Court 30 Westbourne Avenue Ballymena
Camphill 62 Toome Road Ballymena	Croft Lodge 6 Woodcroft Lane Oldpark Road Ballymena	Pinewood 101 Frys Road Ballymena	Rylands 11 Doagh Road Kells, Ballymena
Carnmoyne 38 Church Street Ahoghill	Galgorm 90 Galgorm Road Ballymena	Prospect 1 Old Galgorm Road Ballymena	Slemish House 28 Broughshane Road Ballymena

Abortion: Severe Foetal Abnormality

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has sought further legal advice on whether there is scope for severe foetal abnormality to be taken into consideration under the risk of permanent and serious damage to the mother's mental or physical health.

(AQW 27001/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department continues to seek advice on the grounds for termination of pregnancy as issues arise.

Foetal abnormality is not a ground for termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland. Any change to the criminal law framing this area is a matter for the Department of Justice, the Executive and the Assembly.

Domiciliary Care Workers: Training

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the minimum training requirement for domiciliary care workers; and how are standards enforced in the independent sector.

(AQW 27022/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) sets out mandatory training requirements for staff in 'Guidance on Mandatory Training for Providers of Care in Regulated Services'. The guidance sets out a number of areas of training specifically in relation to domiciliary care workers, including: Vulnerable Adults & Child Protection; Medication; Manual Handling; Managing Service Users' Money; Restraint or management of Challenging Behaviour; Infection Control; Fire safety; and Food Hygiene. The guidance is available on the RQIA website.

In addition, the Minimum Care Standards for Domiciliary Care Agencies sets out the following in terms of training requirements for staff:

- The registered manager requires newly appointed staff to provide evidence of training most recently undertaken that fulfils mandatory training requirements.
- Mandatory training requirements are met.
- The training needs of individual staff for their roles and responsibilities are identified and arrangements are in place to meet them.

RQIA is responsible for regulating a range of health and social care providers, both statutory and independent, in accordance with the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation)(Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and its supporting regulations. This includes domiciliary care agencies.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when Altnagelvin Hospital will be able to provide primary percutaneous coronary intervention (PPCI) treatment, in line with the treatment provided by the Royal Victoria Hospital; and whether the delay in providing treatment has disadvantaged rural communities.

(AQW 27064/11-15)

Mr Poots: The next phase of regional roll-out of the primary PCI service is expected to be in place by summer 2014 when Altnagelvin Hospital will become Northern Ireland's second primary PCI centre. Until then, services for patients who are not included in the catchment area of the Belfast service will continue with the use of clot-busting drugs followed by planned PCI before they are discharged from hospital.

Department of Justice

Interpreters

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid for interpreters to attend court hearings in (i) Magistrates Courts; (ii) Crown Courts; and (iii) the High Court, in each of the last twelve months, broken down by court division.

(AQW 26397/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The following tables set out the cost of interpreter and document translation services for each of the last 12 months in (i) Magistrates' Courts; (ii) Crown Courts; and (iii) the High Court by court division.

Division of Belfast

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
High Court	£1,786	£1,731	£0	£2,407	£1,889	£2,240	£1,946	£8,859	£2,961	£2,856	£2,355	£294
Crown Court	£1,290	£6,146	£403	£11,202	£1,360	£9,205	£7,606	£10,212	£8,289	£2,652	£260	£268
Magistrates' Court	£5,175	£5,377	£1,111	£7,808	£3,988	£7,848	£4,657	£5,969	£5,953	£5,209	£5,616	£4,290

Division of Antrim

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
Crown Court	£0	£325	£0	£943	£163	£153	£3,068	£1,138	£0	£610	£8,277	£0
Magistrates' Court	£3,537	£2,830	£868	£3,543	£2,555	£2,676	£2,003	£4,794	£3,492	£3,465	£3,410	£1,602

Division of Armagh

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
Crown Court	£320	£1,452	£0	£2,126	£1,997	£1,278	£1,795	£1,321	£516	£10,090	£321	£0
Magistrates' Court	£2,539	£3,130	£1,770	£3,685	£2,060	£3,862	£2,802	£2,326	£2,510	£1,401	£3,026	£968

Division of Craigavon

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
Crown Court	£2,751	£967	£0	£492	£3,431	£4,157	£6,871	£262	£0	£2,603	£460	£144
Magistrates' Court	£3,151	£5,483	£1,049	£7,104	£3,911	£3,338	£2,735	£3,913	£2,500	£1,872	£3,181	£1,623

Division of Londonderry

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
Crown Court	£30	£0	£0	£335	£188	£2,754	£0	£0	£388	£0	£3,334	£0
Magistrates' Court	£1,645	£2,024	£350	£2,043	£1,524	£1,055	£1,451	£2,537	£1,634	£1,304	£2,267	£1,391

Division of Ards

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
Crown Court	£3,136	£448	£0	£1,962	£148	£455	£1,960	£0	£0	£5,902	£0	£0
Magistrates' Court	£1,492	£1,556	£1,336	£1,967	£1,105	£1,102	£1,276	£1,297	£870	£1,762	£1,590	£738

Division of Fermanagh & Tyrone

	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013
Crown Court	£386	£197	£0	£11,085	£552	£1,672	£0	£490	£4,821	£3,903	£490	£0
Magistrates' Court	£7,709	£8,595	£1,846	£10,181	£7,135	£6,500	£3,492	£7,140	£4,284	£3,848	£5,766	£3,063

Prisons: Assaults

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many reported assaults by prisoners against staff have taken place, in each of the last twelve months, broken down by prison facility and juvenile justice unit; and to outline the seriousness or nature of each assault.

(AQW 26485/11-15)

Mr Ford: The breakdown of assaults by prisoners against staff for each of the last twelve months is shown in the table below:

		Total	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood	Juvenile Justice Centre
2012	Oct	2	1	0	1	0
2012	Nov	10	9	0	1	0
2012	Dec	3	2	0	1	0
2013	Jan	4	3	0	1	0
2013	Feb	9	7	0	2	0
2013	Mar	12	6	1	5	0
2013	Apr	10	5	2	2	1
2013	May	6	3	1	2	0
2013	Jun	6	4	0	2	0
2013	Jul	14	8	1	2	3
2013	Aug	9	7	1	0	1
2013	Sep	11	7	0	2	2
		96	62	6	21	7

Three of the assaults reported at the Juvenile Justice Centre, and one assault at Maghaberry, were recorded as serious. The serious assault at Maghaberry resulted in minor injuries for three members of staff.

Prisoners: Keys to Cells

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners hold keys to their own cells, broken down by prison.

(AQW 26555/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of the 8 October 2013 the total number of prisoners who hold keys to their own cells, broken down by establishment, is as follows:

Maghaberry	173
Magilligan	234
Hydebank Wood (Ash House)	9
Hydebank Wood (YOC)	4

Noel Parker: Temporary Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25218/11-18, to clarify the phrase within the stated Terms of Reference “What influence did a named manager have on the process and what were the circumstances that led to their departure from NIPS”; and to detail how this was brought to his attention and/or that of investigators, particularly given his response to AQW 25624/11-15.

(AQW 26556/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following a series of Assembly Questions, management at Maghaberry Prison conducted a fact finding exercise aimed at establishing the detailed information available. On 4 July 2013 the Director of Offender Policy & Operations initiated a formal investigation and issued terms of reference accordingly.

The phrasing of the terms of reference should not be taken as an inference of malpractice or guilt.

The phrases in question relate to an assessment of the role and level of influence that a named manager may have had. Furthermore, as the named manager resigned from NIPS to pursue a new career the Investigating Governor was asked to establish what involvement, if any, that individual had in the Temporary Release process.

The response issued to AQW/25624/11-15 remains valid.

Prison Service: Compromise Agreements

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24971/11-15 and AQW 24920/11-15, whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service, prior to resourcing the financial commitments to effect the Compromise Agreements, discussed each case in terms of (i) regularity; (ii) propriety; and (iii) value for money with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(AQW 26558/11-15)

Mr Ford: There was no requirement to refer this matter to the Department of Finance and Personnel because the payments are within the authority of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Maghaberry Prison: Officer to Prisoner Ratio

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice to detail the ratio of prison officers to prisoners at Maghaberry Prison.

(AQW 26560/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below provides the information requested:

House	Officer to Prisoner ratio at unlock
Bann	1:22
Braid	1:15
Erne	1:18
Foyle	1:21
Lagan	1:17
Roe 1&2	1:18

House	Officer to Prisoner ratio at unlock
Roe 3&4	1:6
Bush 1&2	1:7
Bush 3&4	1:21
Glen	Not occupied
Martin	1:7
Wilson	1:21
Quoile	1:15

Prisons: Prisoners Per Cell

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice to outline his Departments policy in relation to the number of prisoners per cell and whether this is being adhered to in all prisons.

(AQW 26561/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no written policy in relation to the number of prisoners per cell. The number of prisoners housed per cell in each establishment is dictated by an increased prisoner population, availability of accommodation and a cell sharing risk assessment process.

Litigation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 26037/11-15, to detail the data that his Department holds on the costs of litigation; and to outline the mechanism used to allocate funding for legal costs.

(AQW 26577/11-15)

Mr Ford: The type of data held by my Department on the cost of litigation varies in each business area according to the type of case. The data includes, for example, the case reference number, forename and surname of name of claimant and details of costs.

As previously stated with regard to AQW/24826/11-15 and AQW/26037/11-15, the data is held in a format from which the information requested could only be provided by undertaking additional work at disproportionate cost.

Funding for litigation costs is allocated as part of the Department's normal budget setting process where relevant divisions bid for the necessary funding as part of a spending review process and the annual in-year monitoring process.

National Crime Agency: Legal Highs

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25384/11-15, for his assessment of whether the National Crime Agency not being fully operational locally will result in difficulties in tackling the issue of legal highs.

(AQW 26584/11-15)

Mr Ford: The absence of a fully operational National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland could indeed impact on work to tackle new psychoactive substances (legal highs).

For instance, the NCA will not have police powers to investigate the supply of new psychoactive substances here.

In addition, there is no requirement to consult me as Justice Minister or the Policing Board on NCA's plans for Northern Ireland. This means that we may have less influence on their operations internationally, or they may be more likely to decline our requests for assistance using their non-devolved powers.

Temporary Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25218/11-15, why he waited to 4 July 2013 to appoint an investigating governor when the details were known in advance of this date; and whether this was compliant with procedures.

(AQW 26595/11-15)

Mr Ford: Management at Maghaberry Prison were instructed to conduct a fact finding exercise aimed at establishing the detailed information available. Once this had been established a Senior Governor from Headquarters was appointed on 4 July 2013 to carry out an investigation under the Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Sexual Offences: Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases involving sexual offences are in the court system, broken down by (a) Magistrates; and (b) Crown Courts, and shown per court division.

(AQW 26599/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below details the number of active cases involving sexual offences in the Magistrates' Court and Crown Court broken down by County Court Division.

Table 1

Division	Magistrates' Court	Crown Court	Total
Antrim	28	31	59
Ards	40	22	62
Armagh and South Down	31	18	49
Belfast	105	100	205
Craigavon	37	15	52
Fermanagh and Tyrone	42	26	68
Londonderry	44	24	68
Total	327	236	563

Table 2 details the number of active cases involving sexual offences that are currently being appealed before the County Court and the Court of Appeal by County Court Division.

Table 2

Division	County Court	Court of Appeal	Total
Antrim	0	1	1
Ards	0	4	4
Armagh and South Down	0	1	1
Belfast	5	3	8
Craigavon	0	1	1
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	1	2
Londonderry	2	0	2
Total	8	11	19

Note: Information is provided from the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS) and is current at 4 October 2013.

Housing Estates: Violence and Antisocial Behaviour

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how his Department is tackling violence and antisocial behaviour in housing estates.

(AQW 26624/11-15)

Mr Ford: Tackling ASB and violence is the responsibility of a number of partners. Therefore this response includes both input from my Department's perspective and from the Department for Social Development, who have specific responsibility for social housing policy.

You will already be aware, through your membership of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, that the Police Service for Northern Ireland has operational responsibility for dealing with violent crime and that the Policing Plan update for 2013/14 contains a number of outcomes aimed at reducing violent crime.

At a strategic level, my Department has established Delivery Groups to support the achievement of these outcomes and to contribute to the wider safer communities outcomes of the Community Safety Strategy. These Groups bring together key partners, with responsibility for tackling the wide range of issues, to develop and deliver solutions.

The work of the Delivery Groups includes the implementation of the key priorities and outcomes outlined in the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs 2011-16; encouraging Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and Drug and Alcohol Co-ordinating Teams to develop and implement joint initiatives to tackle substance related harm; developing measures to provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities of agencies in dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB); reviewing the role of ASB forums; and ensuring appropriate powers are in place to tackle ASB.

The Housing Executive, one of the partners represented on the Anti-social Behaviour Delivery Group, has a key role in tackling violence and ASB in housing estates.

Their use of warning letters has proved extremely successful in stemming ASB, often stopping unacceptable behaviour before more robust action becomes necessary. While many disputes are resolved through informal discussion by the parties involved, mediation provides an alternative when that is unsuccessful. The Housing Executive introduced its own in-house Mediation Service in 2002/03 and now has over 30 accredited external mediators. They also use the services of community-based restorative justice groups, Northern Ireland Alternatives and Community Restorative Justice Ireland, to provide community-based mediation as a means of addressing reported incidents of ASB in many areas.

The Housing Executive also makes use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) which are voluntary written agreements between the Housing Executive and individuals involved in ASB. The Housing Executive has advised that, since their introduction in 2006/07, ABCs have proved to be helpful in stopping ASB. If the individual fails to respond to offers of assistance and the ASB continues, or if the ASB is of such a serious nature that the Housing Executive must take immediate action, they will then use legal interventions that are available. For example, they may choose to repossess the property occupied by the perpetrator, or may seek an injunction to stop the ASB and protect the community.

At a local level, the Housing Executive has 65 Neighbourhood Officers in post who contribute to making their estates cleaner and safer places to live. The Housing Executive also funds various schemes with partner agencies to address crime and the fear of crime on their estates. The 4 Tier scheme in Antrim and Newtownabbey is an example of partnership working, providing a flexible tailored approach to meet specific crime prevention and community safety needs. The Housing Executive is also involved in the funding of a number of night-time warden schemes aimed at addressing issues of ASB and nuisance related incidents. The wardens work with local PSNI Neighbourhood Policing Teams and also with Housing Executive staff, and act as a point of contact for the public who have concerns regarding ASB, especially at nights or weekends.

In addition, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships have developed local action plans to tackle issues which are of concern to local communities. These measures include the delivery of a range of initiatives, such as youth engagement and diversion programmes, for example, cage sports; mediation programmes which aim to reduce ASB arising from neighbourhood disputes; and alcohol awareness programmes which make the links between ASB and underage drinking. The Housing Executive are represented on PCSPs and input to the development and delivery of initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The Department of Social Development also supports Housing Associations to effectively tackle violence and ASB. This included a training event taken forward in association with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations last year to disseminate good practice.

All Housing Associations are expected to have ASB policies in place. Local Housing Associations are using a range of programmes, including the REACT programme and the Chartered Institute of Housing's Respect programme, to help ensure housing officers are well-trained in dealing with these matters. When specific problems occur, Housing Associations work closely with the PSNI and Housing Executive in the first instance, then with mediation and other agencies to address issues with tenants. Associations are also doing a range of preventative work, such as Helm Housing's anti-bullying and anti-violence work with primary schools in Belfast.

The Minister for Social Development will, in the near future, be publishing proposals for new legislation to help the Housing Executive and other social landlords to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Appeal Tribunals: Audio Recording

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will introduce audio recording of all Appeals Tribunal hearings, including hearings in relation to social benefits, similar to those that exist in Crown Courts and prisoner adjudications within prisons.

(AQW 26668/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to AQW/20632/11-15.

It is a matter for the Minister for Social Development to consider whether additional resources can be provided to support alternative methods to record benefit appeal tribunals. However the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, who support the administration and the President of the Appeal Tribunals, have agreed with the Department for Social Development to initiate a project to test the arrangements and benefits of introducing audio recording in benefit appeals tribunals.

Emergency Procedures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW25573/11-15, on how many occasions have the emergency procedures been activated, including the nature of the incident, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26670/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information you requested is not recorded in an easily retrievable format, and it will not therefore be possible to fully answer the question in the timeframe available for AQWs.

I will write to the Member once the full information is obtained.

Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, since their inception, how many Supporting Prisoners at Risk audits have been carried out per prison facility; and to detail the result of each audit.

(AQW 26672/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service introduced an enhanced auditing system of the Supporting Prisoners at Risk documentation in March 2013. The table below shows the number of audits completed broken down by establishment.

At the end of each individual audit the auditor records the outcome and the action that is required locally. This information is not held centrally.

Establishment	No of SPARs Audited
Maghaberry	94
Magilligan	18
Hydebank	58

Legal Aid: Cost

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total cost of Legal Aid in each of the last 3 financial years.

(AQW 26693/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total cost of Legal Aid, excluding administration costs, in each of the last 3 financial years is as follows.

2010/11	£93.3m
2011/12	£101.7m
2012/13	£100.5m

Further detailed information is available by accessing the Annual Accounts of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission from their website: www.nilsc.org.uk.

Legal Aid: Access

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice to detail how he is ensuring that people who require Legal Aid have the ability to access it, both for civil and criminal matters.

(AQW 26698/11-15)

Mr Ford: Criminal legal aid is granted by the court under the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The court grants criminal legal aid to defendants if it is satisfied that their means are insufficient to enable them to obtain legal advice and it is desirable in the interests of justice that they should have free legal aid.

Civil legal aid is granted by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission where two statutory tests are met, namely the applicant:-

- has shown reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to proceedings, and
- meets the financial eligibility test for legal aid.

A number of consultations have issued this year regarding criminal and civil legal aid and I will give careful consideration to all the points raised by consultees who have responded.

It is my intention to ensure that we maintain the ability of those who require legal aid to access it, whether it is for civil matters or criminal matters, as far as possible.

Legal Aid: Budget Reduction

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact the reductions in Legal Aid budgets will have on legal practices; and to detail the methodology behind his assessment.

(AQW 26717/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials in my Department conduct Impact Assessments, including economic impact appraisals, prior to going out to consultation on the proposed legal aid changes. This is carried out in accordance with guidance contained in OFMDM's policy toolkit.

In conducting the initial Impact Assessments, it is not always possible for officials to arrive at an accurate assessment of the impact the reforms will have on individual legal firms, as information is not routinely available on the levels of income obtained from private work that is not funded by legal aid. If information in relation to private earnings is brought to the attention of officials, as part of the consultation process through answering the impact assessment questionnaire (issued as part of the consultation) or otherwise, the Impact Assessments will take account of this to inform the decision making process.

Rioting

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Justice to detail the age profile of people convicted of offences relating to rioting, since December 2012.

(AQW 26718/11-15)

Mr Ford: The most recent year for which information on convictions is available is 2009. Therefore, it is not possible to provide convictions information for the period requested in the question.

Parades Commission

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice whether he has made representations to the Parades Commission in the last 12 months.

(AQW 26725/11-15)

Mr Ford: No.

Legal Aid: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consultation and discussions have taken place with (i) the Law Society; and (ii) the Bar Council on the proposed £14 million reduction in the funding for Legal Aid.

(AQW 26766/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from the Department met with the Law Society on 23 September 2013 and gave a presentation on all of the proposals for legal aid reform. The key proposals discussed are set out in the table below.

Proposals	Proposed Estimated Savings
Legal aid funding for representation in civil cases	£3.5 million
Money damages – alternatives to legal aid	£1 million
Reform of financial eligibility tests	£2.9 million
Civil legal aid Remuneration	£13.8 million
Crown Court fees	£5.6 million

Officials from the Department also met with a representative of the Family Bar Association at the end of August 2013 and are awaiting the Bar Council to identify suitable dates to discuss the proposals for changes to Civil legal aid remuneration.

Further meetings will take place over the coming weeks with both arms of the legal profession. The outcome of these meetings, together with the substantive responses to the consultation will be carefully considered by me and reflected in the Department's consultation response documents.

Prison Service: Museum Collection

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the plans to rehouse the Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum collection.

(AQW 26768/11-15)

Mr Ford: I recognise the importance of many of the artefacts held by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

NIPS is currently giving consideration to the future arrangements for storing and managing these artefacts and has engaged with a number of interested parties. Work is also ongoing to clarify what - if any - legal obligations are attached to the material. No final decisions have been taken.

Ruling of an Appeal Hearing in Ards Division County Court

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice to detail the legal significance of the ruling in an appeal hearing in Ards Division County Court, which led to the outcome being listed on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website under Neutral Citation No [2013] NICTY 3.

(AQW 26774/11-15)

Mr Ford: This appeal related to the interpretation of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. The Act gives a business a statutory right to claim interest and compensation for the late payment of commercial debt.

The ruling was published on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website as the County Court Judge considered it may be useful to others involved in small claims proceedings.

Small Claims: Judicial Decisions

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice how many County Court Orders arising out of cases originally heard in the Small Claims Court have subsequently been listed under the Judicial Decisions area on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website.

(AQW 26776/11-15)

Mr Ford: Fourteen judgements published on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website arose out of cases originally heard in the Small Claims Court.

Offender Levy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total accrued from the Offender Levy; and of this (i) how much has been allocated; (ii) to list the organisations and individuals who have received an allocation; and (iii) whether any of these funds are being allocated to part-finance Legal Aid.

(AQW 26780/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since its introduction in June 2012, the Offender Levy has generated £146,361 for the Victims of Crime Fund (as at 30 September 2013). Of this, a total of £50,178 has been allocated to Barnardos Northern Ireland, Dunclug Partnership, Mediation Northern Ireland, Seven Towers Community and Cultural Educational Association, Women's Aid and Victim Support Northern Ireland. No funding from the Victims of Crime Fund has been or will be allocated to part-finance legal aid. The purpose of the fund is to deliver improved services to victims and witnesses of crime.

Northern Ireland Jurisdiction: Insurance Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25698/11-15, how does this jurisdiction compare to other court divisions in relation to no insurance cases.

(AQW 26781/11-15)

Mr Ford: Uninsured driving is an offence under Article 90(4) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The most recent two years for which the information requested is available are 2008 and 2009. The Table below gives the number of convictions for uninsured driving by Court Division for 2008 and 2009.

Number of convictions for uninsured driving by Court Division, 2008-2009

Court Division	2008	2009
Ards	527	549
Antrim	502	535
Armagh & South Down	472	483
Belfast	1,265	1,264
Craigavon	395	409
Fermanagh & Tyrone	599	823
Londonderry	383	462
Total	4,143	4,525

Note:

- 1 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.

Temporary Release: Investigation Finding

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 25218/11-15, as the investigation was submitted to the commissioning authority on 31 August 2013, when does he intend to make the findings available.
(AQW 26782/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this was an internal disciplinary investigation it would not be appropriate to make the findings publicly available.

Prisoners: Self-harm and Suicide in South Eastern Trust

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24166/11-15; AQW 24239/11-15; and AQW 24919/11-15, to outline why he, in conjunction with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, has not commissioned a formal review to examine, report and make recommendations on the safety and care of vulnerable prisoners in terms of the prevention of acts of self-harm, including attempted suicide and death by suicide in establishments managed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and given that he is Chairperson of the Prison Oversight Group, which in the Group's March 2013 Report states "the number of deaths in custody remains a concern" and "appropriate care of vulnerable prisoners will continue to be prioritised for improvement in that area"; and to detail why his inaction and his answers to previous Written Questions do not reflect the priority concerns of the Prison Oversight Group.

(AQW 26801/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service takes its responsibility for the safe custody of all those in its care extremely seriously and the safety and care of vulnerable prisoners continues to be a priority.

As previously advised the Northern Ireland Prison Service is committed to completing a formal review of its Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Policy, which will be taken forward in due course in consultation with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET).

The Prison Service keeps its policies and procedures subject to ongoing informal review and continues to work with the SET and other partnership agencies to take all practicable and reasonable measures to prevent prisoners inflicting harm on themselves.

Sexual Abuse: Historical Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, whether there is evidence to suggest that a percentage of historical sexual abuse cases involving children being processed through the court system are a result of reluctance to report the alleged offences at the time due to fear of community or terrorist recrimination by engaging with police at the time of the offences, and if not, will he commission an investigation to establish if this is the case.

(AQW 26804/11-15)

Mr Ford: Anyone who has concerns about any individual who they fear is posing a risk to the safety of a child can, and should, go to the police or social services at any time about their concerns. The PSNI have in place local public protection teams to deal with these issues. Children's services in Health and Social Care Trusts also have a role to protect children and work closely with police where a risk to a child is identified, under the Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and

Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child Abuse – Northern Ireland. Social Services are also represented on the local public protection teams.

It is not clear what benefits an historic study of the kind the member proposes would bring to the justice system.

National Crime Agency: Restricted Powers

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to outline the issues that the National Crime Agency will not be able to deal with locally from October 2013 if the devolution of these functions does not proceed.

(AQW 26808/11-15)

Mr Ford: The National Crime Agency's powers are restricted to the reserved and excepted fields. As a consequence, the NCA's civil recovery remit is limited to non-devolved cases and even in those cases, it can only pursue assets within this jurisdiction. This leaves a serious gap in our law enforcement effort.

Additionally, NCA officers do not have devolved police powers in Northern Ireland and, therefore, are unable to directly assist the PSNI and others with investigations.

The absence of powers will present significant challenges. As the NCA came into existence on 7 October it is not yet possible to identify the additional annual costs of covering the gaps; however this will be kept under review.

National Crime Agency: Annual Cost of Functions

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, following the commencement of the operations of the National Crime Agency locally, to detail the estimated additional annual cost of the functions that are expected to continue to be carried out by the PSNI if devolution of those functions does not proceed.

(AQW 26810/11-15)

Mr Ford: The National Crime Agency's powers are restricted to the reserved and excepted fields. As a consequence, the NCA's civil recovery remit is limited to non-devolved cases and even in those cases, it can only pursue assets within this jurisdiction. This leaves a serious gap in our law enforcement effort.

Additionally, NCA officers do not have devolved police powers in Northern Ireland and, therefore, are unable to directly assist the PSNI and others with investigations.

The absence of powers will present significant challenges. As the NCA came into existence on 7 October it is not yet possible to identify the additional annual costs of covering the gaps; however this will be kept under review.

Reducing Offending in Partnership

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 26210/11-15, to outline the steps that are being taken to address the problem, following the disclosure that under the Reducing Offending in Partnership pilot, 28 percent of offenders increased their offending.

(AQW 26811/11-15)

Mr Ford: The approaches taken through Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) enable the police to identify the minority of offenders who have increased their offending, target resources accordingly, and ensure that a clear and consistent approach is taken to addressing their behaviour.

The sharing of information and the partnership working among the agencies involved in ROP, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Youth Justice Agency and the Northern Ireland Prison Service, are key factors in dealing effectively with those offenders. Actions may include: dealing robustly and quickly with all incidents involving those identified offenders; ensuring compliance with all terms of bail, release licences or community orders; and providing the offender with support to address the issues contributing to their offending behaviour.

Legal Aid: Repayment and Appeal

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of people who have repaid Legal Aid after being found guilty of a criminal offence; (ii) the amount repaid; and (iii) the number of successful appeals against repaying Legal Aid.

(AQW 26877/11-15)

Mr Ford: Criminal Legal Aid is granted by the court under the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 ("the 1981 Order"). Where a grant is made, the defendant is entitled to free legal aid in the preparation and conduct of his defence. Under the 1981 Order there is no provision for the defendant to make a contribution or repay the costs of his defence if he is found guilty.

I introduced Recovery of Defence Costs Orders (RDCO) to recover legal costs from wealthy defendants who are subsequently found to be in a position to repay some or all of their defence costs.

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission ("the Commission") recently made an application for an RDCO in respect of one defendant. However, after investigation into the defendant's financial circumstances, the Commission decided that it was not appropriate to continue with the application.

Legal Aid: Impact of Change on Vulnerable

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact the proposed changes to Legal Aid will have on the most vulnerable in society.

(AQW 26943/11-15)

Mr Ford: In my assessment the proposed changes to legal aid will have no adverse impact on the most vulnerable in society.

Prison Service: STORM Assessment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the STORM assessment, devised by the University of Manchester, has been adopted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and if so, if it is carried out as part of Supporting Prisoner and Risk procedures.

(AQW 26970/11-15)

Mr Ford: The STORM assessment has not been adopted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The Supporting Prisoners at Risk procedures are underpinned by the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training model in assessing those who are at risk of self-harm or suicide.

Department for Regional Development

Programme for Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress made on each of his Department's Programme for Government commitments.

(AQW 25301/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Progress by all departments on their PfG Commitments is monitored centrally on a quarterly basis. The latest update is available via the Strategic Online Report published on the Northern Ireland Executive's website (www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg).

Cycle-friendly Planning and Design

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are plans to review the guidance on cycle-friendly planning and design, in conjunction with local authorities and other partners, to ensure that opportunities to improve cycling conditions are incorporated, wherever possible, into roads, traffic planning schemes and all planned road maintenance work.

(AQW 25715/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department uses a number of guidance documents relating to cycle provision and design to embrace best practice in this area. These include the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), Local Transport Notes produced by Department for Finance (DfT) such as 'Cycle Infrastructure Design' and various Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC), Sustrans and Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation (CHIT) guidance documents along with other documents produced by local councils and other voluntary groups. Revision of these documents is a matter for the individual groups and bodies responsible for them. The Department will engage with interested stakeholders with the aim of improving the provision of cycling facilities.

I have recently instructed officials in my Department to give increased and focussed priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. I have also asked for a new cycling unit to be established, to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

Footpaths: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of providing new footpaths in the North Down area, in the last three financial years.

(AQW 25756/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Additional detail on specific schemes progressed in the North Down area, over the past three years, can be viewed in Council Reports for North Down which are available on my Department's website. Details of the relevant links are included for your convenience:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8946

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8202

Roads: Resurfacing in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs of resurfacing roads in the North Down area, in the last three financial years.

(AQW 25757/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain an analysis of spend in the format requested, however, it does maintain details of total Capital Structural Maintenance spend, which includes maintenance activities such as resurfacing, surface dressing and structural drainage. This expenditure is recorded by District Council area not by Constituency area.

Details of expenditure of this type in the North Down area, during the last three years, are set out in the table below:

North Down Council Area

Financial Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Spend £k	1,681	2,266	1,977

Additional detail on specific schemes progressed in the North Down area, over the past three years, can be viewed in Council Reports for North Down which are available on my Department's website. Details of the relevant links are included for your convenience:

- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8946
- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8202

North Down: Dropped Kerbs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of providing dropped kerbs in the North Down area, in the last three financial years.
(AQW 25758/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Additional detail on specific schemes progressed in the North Down area, over the past three years, can be viewed in Council Reports for North Down which are available on my Department's website. Details of the relevant links are included for your convenience:

- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8946
- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/doc-details.htm?docid=8202

Cycle Lanes: Maintenance

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service have made an assessment of cycle lane lines that require re-painting.
(AQW 26183/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department carries out regular inspections of all public roads, footways and cycle lanes that are adopted, or maintained by Roads Service, to ensure that essential response maintenance is identified and completed as necessary.

If the Member has any specific concerns about any cycle lane lines that are maintained by my Department, he should notify the local Roads Service section office, who will investigate his concerns.

Cycle Lanes: Maintenance

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether unmaintained cycle lanes act as a deterrent to people considering cycling.
(AQW 26184/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The condition of cycle lanes is likely to be one of many factors that people consider when deciding whether to take up cycling.

If the Member has any specific concern/s about any cycle lanes that are maintained by my Department, he should notify the local Roads Service section office, who will investigate his concerns.

Translink and Ulsterbus: Irish Signage

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the Translink and Ulsterbus services where routes are displayed in Irish.
(AQW 26234/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised my officials that Metro services on the Metro 10, Falls Roads corridor services, (with the exception of service 10H which travels along the Falls Road but which turns into Blacks Road), carry destinations signs in English and Irish with the display alternating between the two. The introduction of these signs was subject to appropriate consultation. On Ulsterbus services 274 (Londonderry-Dublin) and X4 (Londonderry-Dublin), the destination signage is in English and Irish and alternate between the two languages on services.

Ballymena: Roads Service Parking Notices

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking tickets have been issued due to (i) cars being parked after the expiry of the time paid for; and (ii) the incorrect placement of a pay and display ticket, in each Roads Service operated car park in Ballymena.

(AQW 26315/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below contains details of Parking Charge Notices issued in each Roads Service Car Park in Ballymena for the following codes:

- Code 82 – parked after expiry of time paid for in a pay and display car park; and
- Code 83 – parked in a pay and display car park without clearly displaying a valid pay and display ticket (it is not possible to distinguish between those issued for incorrect display or non display).

Parking Charge Notices issued in each Roads Service Car Park in Ballymena

Location	Financial Year		
	11/12 Apr-Mar	12/13 Apr-Mar	13/14 Apr-Sept
Church St			
Code 82	180	133	55
Code 83	179	139	61
Broughshane St			
Code 82	334	185	117
Code 83	421	304	125
Ballymoney Rd			
Code 82	178	122	60
Code 83	181	171	93
Harryville			
Code 82	-	12	2
Code 83	-	96	28

A32

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the recent; and (ii) planned investment for upgrading the A32 between Omagh and Enniskillen.

(AQW 26359/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's improvement strategy for the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen route includes a number of significant road improvement schemes. Two of the schemes identified within this programme have already been delivered. The £2m improvement scheme at A32 Drumskinny was completed in early 2012 and a £7.3m realignment scheme at A32 Shannaragh opened to traffic in December 2012.

Together these schemes have improved the quality of the route, enhanced road safety and reduced travel times for all road users, including traffic generated by the new South West Acute Hospital, which opened in June 2012.

Design work is also well advanced on a number of other priority schemes along the route, including schemes at Cornamuck, Esker Bog, Kilgortnaleague and Newpark. However, delivery of these schemes will be dependent on the outcome of future budget settlements

Roads: Winter Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what additional measures are being put in place to help cope with difficult road and pavement conditions during the coming winter.

(AQW 26413/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Following the two snow events last winter, I commissioned an independent review of the performance of Roads Service over the period. The National Winter Service Research Group carried out a comprehensive review, examining every aspect of the winter service programme. The outcome of the review was positive. I have placed a copy of the review in the Assembly Library.

One of the key recommendations from the review was that the winter service fleet replacement programme continues to be prioritised in order to improve the reliability of gritters and other equipment. I am committed to investing in the winter service

fleet and, to that end, will continue to seek funding to ensure the fleet we have is fit for purpose and capable of dealing with the long winter period. I hope Members will support bids for this additional funding.

A further recommendation highlighted the need for consistency of service in relation to the salting of footways. My Department has arrangements with 24 of the 26 District Councils to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow. I have written to the Chief Executives of the remaining two councils to encourage them to come on board.

Millisle: Footpath Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath schemes are planned for the Millisle area.
(AQW 26421/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 26015/11-15.

Donaghadee: Footpath Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath schemes are planned for the Donaghadee area.
(AQW 26423/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 26015/11-15.

Groomsport: Footpath Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath schemes are planned for the Groomsport area.
(AQW 26424/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 26015/11-15.

Conlig: Footpath Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath schemes are planned for the Conlig area.
(AQW 26426/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 26015/11-15.

Holywood: Footpath Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath schemes are planned for the Holywood area.
(AQW 26427/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 26015/11-15.

Train Stations: Cycle Storage

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25681/11-15, to detail the stations in which bicycle storage will be expanded; and the number of new spaces that are being considered at each.
(AQW 26440/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink will be focusing their resources on locations that are currently recognised as close to capacity. Namely Bangor, Belfast Central, Lisburn, Lurgan and Moira rail stations. Translink will liaise with customers at local stations to establish the required level of expansion.

Translink intend to commence work on this project at the end of this year, therefore it is not yet possible to quantify the number of spaces that are being considered at each location.

Cycle Boxes

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of complaints received by (i) his Department; and (ii) Translink regarding buses stopping in an a cycle box.
(AQW 26453/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has received no complaints about vehicles stopping in areas reserved for cyclists, however, a number of queries have been raised about the usage and enforceability of this provision.

Translink has received complaints on this issue, which relate to an Ulsterbus vehicle and two Metro vehicles.

Cycle Boxes

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the PSNI on enforcing cycle boxes.
(AQW 26454/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have had no discussions with the PSNI about enforcing advance stop lines at junctions. However, my officials have discussed the general issue of advance stop lines with the PSNI's Road Policing Unit.

Buses Stopping in Cycle Boxes

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures are in place to ensure that bus drivers do not park in cycle boxes.

(AQW 26455/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In terms of contravening an advanced stop line, Rule 178 of the Highway Code refers (<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/highway-code.pdf>) - Motorists, including motorcyclists, MUST stop at the first white line reached.

The responsibility for enforcement rests with the police, and they can and do enforce against drivers contravening an advanced stop line. In terms of parking, my Department's traffic attendants will enforce against any vehicle found parked in contravention of any on-street restriction.

Cycling Infrastructure

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the new departmental cycling unit will have the remit to promote and deliver the creation of improved and dedicated cycling infrastructure.

(AQW 26464/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The promotion and delivery of improved and dedicated cycling infrastructure is one of a number of cycling related issues that officials within my Department's new cycling unit will be giving consideration to.

The Member may also be aware that my Department's Travelwise Initiative promotes sustainable travel including cycling, by way of a series of marketing campaigns across the year, and seeks to raise awareness of the general public as well as the school population, of the benefits of cycling by delivering events such as Bike Week and Bike To School Day. Cycling is also encouraged as an important element of Workplace Travel Plans with organisations and companies throughout Northern Ireland.

I recently launched the Active School Travel Programme, which will provide a programme of cycle and walking skills training to pupils in up to 180 schools across Northern Ireland over a three year period. The objective of this programme is to encourage school pupils to adopt cycling and walking as their main mode of transport to and from school.

Train Stations: Cycle Storage

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department has given to developing secure covered bicycle storage facilities at train stations, that are monitored by CCTV, similar to those used by Mersey Rail.

(AQW 26493/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The majority of Translink facilities are monitored by CCTV. Translink have agreed to carry out an appropriate feasibility study looking at alternatives that may be available for the future.

North Belfast: Penalty Charge Notices

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the street locations of Penalty Charge Notices issued in North Belfast, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 26522/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not compile figures in relation to Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's) on a Constituency basis and it would require a lengthy and resource intensive exercise scrutinising individual PCN records held on the IT system to obtain the information requested.

However, information in relation to PCNs issued in a specific street can be provided, on request, from my Department's Roads Service.

North Belfast: Penalty Charge Notices

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Penalty Charge Notices have been (i) issued; (ii) paid; (iii) successfully appealed; and (iv) unpaid in North Belfast, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 26523/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain an analysis of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued on a constituency basis.

TEN-T: Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what progress has been made in having Derry designated as a Core Node on the TEN-T Core Network.

(AQW 26545/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Despite intensive and high level lobbying on the part of my Department, the European Commission has decided that Londonderry does not meet the required criteria for designation as a Core Node.

While the exclusion of Londonderry from the Core Network is disappointing, it is important to recognise that on a regional level, the outcomes of TEN-T negotiations are positive for Northern Ireland.

In this context, the securing of an 'isolated network' status by my Department within the TEN-T negotiation process, has provided Northern Ireland with hard won exemptions in terms of compliance with mandatory improvements to network standards. It is these exemptions that have guarded Northern Ireland from very significant levels of compulsory expenditure; which we successfully argued was unjustifiable.

Furthermore, my Department has successfully negotiated the inclusion of Londonderry on the TEN-T Comprehensive Network and this will provide opportunities to compete for funds from within the Connecting Europe Facility funding mechanism.

Craigdarraugh Road, Helen's Bay: Gully Covers

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25173/11-15, when Roads Service installed large gully covers at Craigdarraugh Road, Helen's Bay.

(AQW 26547/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service installed the large gully gratings at Craigdarraugh Road, Helens Bay, whilst completing carriageway resurfacing works during the 1999/2000 financial year.

Magilligan to Greencastle Ferry

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has been approached to provide funding for the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry.

(AQW 26615/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department received a request for financial support from Limavady Borough Council and Donegal County Council in February 2010 which was turned down as my Department has no legislative or direct operational responsibility for the service.

Flooding: Areas at Risk

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the areas that are at risk of flooding and require flood alleviation work to be completed.

(AQW 26619/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has developed The Strategic Flood Map (NI) which shows the areas that are considered to be at risk of flooding from rivers, the sea and surface water. This map was first launched in 2008 and is available on the DARD Rivers Agency website. I am advised that Rivers Agency, under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 has an ongoing programme of flood alleviation works.

As Minister for Regional Development I am responsible for Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water, both of which have important roles in ensuring effectual drainage of our roads and sewerage networks and that they continue to function when we experience heavy rainfall.

My Department continues to work with DARD Rivers Agency and other bodies to coordinate our efforts to alleviate flooding.

Translink and Associated Projects: Funding

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of his Department's budget funds Translink and associated projects.

(AQW 26627/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's current budget for 2013-14 includes planned funding of £98.3 million for Translink of which Public Service Obligation is £25.4 million and Bus / Rail Concessionary Fares £38.5 million. This equates to 11.4% of my Departments total budget for 2013-14. This may change as a result of monitoring rounds in-year.

Active Travel Bill, Wales

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to introduce legislation, taking into account jurisdictional differences, that would share the aims and objectives of the Active Travel Bill in Wales.

(AQW 26640/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Welsh Active Travel Bill would place obligations on local highway authorities to enhance the provision on roads for walking and cycling and to provide for maps of active travel routes. As responsibility for road traffic and pedestrian issues here rests with my department, I am not persuaded of a need to introduce similar legislation.

The aims and objectives of the Welsh Active Travel Bill are similar to those of the Active Travel Strategy, which I launched earlier this year. The Strategy aims to put walking and cycling at the heart of our local transport arrangements and create an environment where it is safer and more practical to walk and cycle.

I have also established a new cycling unit to ensure cycling issues and initiatives are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner across my Department, in partnership with local government, voluntary bodies, public transport operators and the health and education sectors.

Castledawson Roundabout: Bus Service

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the scheduled bus services that use the bus stops at Castledawson roundabout on a daily basis going to or from (i) Belfast; (ii) Londonderry; and (ii) Magherafelt.

(AQW 26646/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following Ulsterbus services serve the Castledawson roundabout.

- Service 110 Cookstown ~ Magherafelt ~ Antrim ~ Belfast
- Service 127 Magherafelt ~ Portglenone ~ Ballymena
- Service 176/116 Magherafelt ~ Maghera ~ Kilrea ~ Coleraine
- Service 210 Cookstown ~ Magherafelt ~ Randalstown ~ Belfast Express
- Service 212 Belfast ~ Dungiven ~ Derry~Londonderry Express
- Service 389b Maiden City Flyer Shuttle

South Antrim: Water Meters

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how many water meters have been installed in South Antrim, in each of the last five years

(AQW 26666/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the number of water meters installed in South Antrim, in each of the last five financial years, is as detailed in the table below. These figures have been determined by reference to the property addresses and post codes within the South Antrim constituency and they include all water meter installations irrespective of reason (newly connected properties, existing properties not previously metered, and renewal of existing meters).

Financial Year	Number of Meters Installed
2008/09	645
2009/10	309
2010/11	656
2011/12	566
2012/13	316

Corran Integrated Primary School: Parking Spaces

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development on what basis, in connection with a current planning application, do an extra 17 parking spaces be deemed sufficient by Roads Service to cater for Corran Integrated school, Larne, which has quadrupled in population over 20 years.

(AQW 26694/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is satisfied the car parking numbers indicated on the latest layout drawing comply with requirements within Planning Policy Statement 3.

Corran Integrated Primary School: Bus Turning

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development on what basis, in connection with a current planning application, does Roads Service approve of a 53 seater bus reversing, several times a day, from Blackcave North, Larne into the turning circle entrance to Corran Integrated School, given the inability of the bus to turn on site; and what regard has there been to the safety considerations.

(AQW 26695/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not given approval for the reversing manoeuvre of a 53 seat bus from Blackcave North, Larne into the turning circle to Corran Integrated School.

Consideration of safety is paramount in my Department's assessment of this planning application, and indeed of any such application.

South Antrim: Speed Limit

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the roads that have a designated speed limit of less than 30 mph in South Antrim.

(AQW 26719/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not hold the information you require on a Parliamentary Constituency basis. If you require information on particular roads or streets, please contact the relevant local Roads Service Section Office who will be able to assist you.

A8

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress on the dualling of the A8 Larne Road.

(AQW 26726/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to advise that construction of the 14km of dual carriageway on the A8, between Coleman's Corner Roundabout and Ballyrickard Road, is now 13 months into a 34 month programme and is currently on schedule to open to traffic by Spring 2015.

Coleraine: Car Parking

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what further work is planned to alleviate car parking problems in Coleraine, before the commencement of the proposed new multi-story car park in the town centre.

(AQW 26727/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are approximately 2,600 parking spaces available for public use in and around Coleraine town centre, including those in private car parks at the Tesco and Dunnes supermarkets. Of these around 25% are on-street, mostly unrestricted and are well used.

Spare capacity is available in the more peripheral car parks, including those at Railway Road and Waterside and the introduction of Variable Message Signage has helped to manage car park usage throughout the district. My Department has plans to further upgrade this system.

In addition, on the Saturdays before Christmas, my Department, in association with Coleraine Borough Council and Translink, plans to introduce a Park & Ride facility to further support local business.

As advised in my reply to AQW 26232/11-15, should you have any specific concerns regarding this issue, please contact the local Roads Service officials, who will be happy to discuss these matters with you in more detail.

Cycling

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25776/11-15, whether he would consider measuring the number of miles cycled by constituency or council area for future surveys.

(AQW 26819/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) is a population survey and uses a methodology which is designed to provide representative geographic coverage across Northern Ireland. Population surveys are designed to report at national level and can only be disaggregated into large geographies such as Belfast Local Government District (LGD), East of NI and West of NI, as currently published in the TSNI. They are not designed to provide information at LGD level.

A6

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A6 Randalstown to Toome Dualling Scheme.

(AQW 26842/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Direction Order and Environmental Notice to Proceed for the Randalstown to Castledawson scheme (of which the Randalstown to Toome scheme forms a part) were confirmed in March 2011. The Vesting Orders remain in draft and will be made after funding for the scheme has been confirmed.

The Inspector's Report on the November 2007 Public Inquiries into the Toome to Castledawson portion of the scheme recommended that detailed plans for the construction of the dual carriageway as designed should be progressed, and the recommended changes to the published proposal, to connect the dual carriageway to Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road at Castledawson, be considered as a separate issue.

A planning application for an alternative junction layout at Bellshill Road was submitted at the end of June 2013 and is currently being considered by DOE Planning.

The Castledawson junction issue would not delay progression of the main scheme.

I have submitted a bid for funding for this scheme in the 2014/15 Capital Budget Exercise and the October Monitoring Round, which if successful, should allow construction to commence in 2014/15.

Queensbury Park, South Belfast: 20mph Speed Limit

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider implementing a 20 mph speed limit in Queensbury Park, South Belfast as a matter of urgency to ensure the safety of children living in the area.

(AQW 27018/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's officials recently updated an earlier assessment of Queensbury Park on the basis of an actual traffic volume and speed survey. Unfortunately, this indicated that Queensbury Park did not rank sufficiently highly, in relation to locations being considered on a prioritised basis for traffic calming measures and as such, Queensbury Park is not one of the areas to be taken forward under the initiative to provide signed only 20mph speed limits.

Department for Social Development

Red Sky: June 2011 Meeting

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 25480/11-15, to list any examples of instances where departmental officials raised concerns about attending a meeting with Red Sky in June 2011.

(AQW 26506/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The role of departmental officials with regard to their Ministers is at all times to act within the authority of the Minister to whom they are accountable and to support the Minister with clear, well reasoned, timely and impartial advice. It is my role as Minister to take decisions in the knowledge of that advice.

Purchase of Private Properties

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 25933/11-15, whether there are any instances where private properties have been purchased for amounts higher than those stated by recognised valuers.

(AQW 26533/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am aware of one instance where a housing association, with the prior approval of my Department, paid a higher amount than that stated by the valuer. The scheme cannot be named for 'commercial in confidence' reasons.

The valuation report quoted the already completed units as having an open market value of £2.37m, but because all were being bought together as one lot a discount was considered appropriate, giving a valuation of £1.96m. The housing association could not close the deal for less than £2.32m.

My Department operates a Total Cost Indicator performance measure for each individual new scheme. This measures the presented cost of a scheme against a cost indication of what the scheme should cost. This provides a value for money assessment of each individual scheme.

In this case, the indicative cost of purchasing these units was adjudged to be £2.6m and on that basis purchase of the units was considered to be value for money.

Where, by exception, it is necessary to work outside of the normal rules in order to secure an opportunity, value for money purchase in an area of high housing need, my Department has in place a robust approval mechanism in place which requires housing associations to seek Departmental approval in advance of proceeding. The rules were properly followed and applied in this exceptional case.

Housing Executive: Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what are the arrangements and respective roles of (i) the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE); and (ii) his Department in the upcoming appointment of the new NIHE Chief Executive.

(AQW 26541/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The appointment of the Chief Executive of the Housing Executive is a matter for the Board of the Housing Executive, however, under the Management Statement Financial Memorandum which has been agreed between the Housing Executive and the Department, the Board in the Housing Executive will appoint a new Chief Executive in consultation with the Department and set objectives and remuneration terms linked to these objectives for the Chief Executive which give due weight to the proper management and use of public monies.

The Department is also required to provide guidance to the new Chief Executive in taking up their appointment as Accounting Officer. The Department may send observers to any stage of the recruitment process.

Staff: Support Grade Salary

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what was the average annual salary of staff in the Support Grade Band on 1 April 2013.

(AQW 26606/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At 1 April 2013 the average salary for staff in the Support Grade Band 1 grade was £ 20,886 and the average salary for staff in the Support Grade Band 2 grade was £16,708

Village, South Belfast: Housing Allocation

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the redevelopment of the Village, South Belfast, whether he will consider giving preference to residents living in the Improvement Area in the allocation of new or refurbished homes, before offering these houses to people on the general housing list.

(AQW 26651/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no grounds for giving preference to residents living in the improvement area. Special conditions attach only to those whose properties were vested within the redevelopment area and it is right that they have priority status to return to the area in which they previously lived.

All social housing in Northern Ireland is allocated in line with the Housing Selection Scheme which points applicants and allocates social housing on a fair and equitable basis. All applicants are free to name their area of choice for housing. If residents living in the improvement area desire to live in the redevelopment area they need to apply to the waiting list for the area and their application will be assessed in the usual way.

So far, 46 allocations and offers have been made for the new homes coming on stream. Of those, 29 have been made to those priority groups either living in the redevelopment area or who have a guarantee letter to return.

Of the remaining 17 from the general waiting list, 7 are in respect of applicants from the improvement area. Applicants from the improvement area are therefore being included where their points justify that decision.

Village, South Belfast: Phase 4

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the redevelopment of the Village, South Belfast, for his assessment of the concern in the community that after Phase 3, there are no plans for a fourth phase; and what assurances he can give that in the absence of any private affordable houses being built on this site, he will take early steps to have social housing built on the site.

(AQW 26652/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It was always the intention to regenerate the Village with three phases of social housing followed by a fourth phase of private affordable housing. The Housing Executive has determined that three phases of social housing totalling 114 new homes will meet their current assessment of social housing need in the area.

The first two phases of 87 new homes are complete or nearing completion. The third phase of 27 houses will start in early 2014. Once planning approval is granted for the third phase, the Housing Executive will commence consultation with the local community about the provision of the affordable housing element.

I shall keep under review the need for additional social housing in the event of affordable housing not proceeding as anticipated.

Housing Executive: Contractor Payments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development, pending the review of alleged overpayment to certain contractors by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, whether any payments that are now due to any of these contractors are currently being withheld.

(AQW 26664/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there are a number of schemes that are deemed live and therefore monies are due on these schemes on an on-going basis. The experts acting for the Housing Executive and those for the contractors are carrying out a sampling exercise at present to determine the status of payments across the framework and the settlement of same.

South Antrim: Empty Homes

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the 32,000 empty homes are in the South Antrim constituency; and how many of these homes are in (i) Ballyclare; and (ii) Antrim, broken down by electoral ward.

(AQW 26740/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Of the 32,000 empty homes 1,056 were in the South Antrim constituency. The table below shows the breakdown by electoral ward.

Council	Electoral Ward	Number Empty
Antrim	Toome	32
	Drumanaway	21
	Cranfield	22
	Randalstown	35
	Shilvodan	34
	Templepatrick	29
	Farranshane	8
	Springfarm	30
	Massereene	79
	Balloo	23
	Fountain Hill	21
	Steeple	10
	Stiles	16
	Greystone	5
	Parkgate	24
	Ballycraigy	17
	Clady	45
	Aldergrove	57
	Crumlin	47
Newtownabbey	Mallusk	90
	Doagh	35
	Ballyclare North	50
	Ballyclare South	67
	Ballynure	40
	Ballyrobert	37
	Hawthorne	18
	Ballyduff	8
	Carnmoney	12
	Mossley	12
	Burnthill	17
Lisburn	Glenavy	115
Total		1056

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

I am informed by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services that the most recent figures (as at 31 August 2013) indicate a total of 30,186 empty residential properties. DFP have advised these figures should be treated with caution as there is no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant.

Glen Dimplex

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has met with representatives of Glen Dimplex NI; and if so, when each meeting took place and who was present.

(AQW 26750/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I met with Neil Stewart, Managing Director, and Graeme Scott General Manager of Glen Dimplex at their premises in Portadown in 1 September 2011. I met with Neill Stewart, Managing Director Glen Dimplex, at my office in

Parliament Buildings on 30 January 2012. I met with David Simpson, MP for Upper Bann, along with Neill Stewart and Neill Collins from Glen Dimplex on 8 August 2013. All meetings were also attended by officials.

Community Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to list the respondees to the recent consultation on Community Asset Transfer; (ii) who will analyse these responses; and (iii) when a report on the implementation of these findings will be brought to the Committee for Social Development.

(AQW 26756/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A list of those organisations and individuals who responded to the recent consultation on Community Asset Transfer is attached below. The responses are currently being considered by officials in my Department who are due to make a presentation to the Committee for Social Development on 7th November 2013.

Respondent	Respondent
Armagh City and District Council	Early Years - the organisation for young children
Brendan Murtagh (Individual)	Fermanagh District Council
Belfast Buildings Trust	Focus on Family and Ballysally & Millburn Collaborative Partnership
Belfast City Council	Heritage Lottery Fund
Belfast Healthy Cities	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Big Lottery Fund	Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust
Building Change Trust	Lisburn City Council
Carnegie UK Trust	Newry and Mourne District Council
Carrickfergus Borough Council	Newry and Mourne District Council
Causeway Communities Engagement Programme	NILGA
Charity Bank	Praxis Care
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland	Rathlin Development and Community Association
Community Foundation NI	Rural Community Network
Community Relations Council	South Eastern Education and Library Board
Co-operative Alternatives	The Fermanagh Trust
Craigavon Borough Council	The Resurgam Trust
Derry City Council	VSB
Derry-Londonderry Strategy Board	

The following organisations contributed to a composite response submitted by Development Trusts NI.

- Andersonstown Neighbourhood Partnership/UACF
- Belfast Met Group
- Bryson Charitable Group
- Colin Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership
- Core Vision
- DTA Scotland
- East Belfast Partnership
- Falls Community Council
- Holywell Trust
- Lagan Canal Trust
- Locality
- New Community Network
- North Belfast Partnership
- Resurgam Trust
- UK Association of Building Preservation Trusts
- Upper Alton Community Forum
- Upper Springfield Development Trust

Seven submissions asked that their responses were held as confidential. Three anonymous responses were also received.

Community Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development when he will publish the results of the recent Community Asset Transfer consultation, and report to the Executive on introducing the necessary legislation, training, budgets and third sector support to ensure a swift implementation.

(AQW 26757/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The consultation on a policy framework for Community Asset Transfer ended on 23rd August. My Department is currently considering the responses. I intend to bring forward my proposals for a policy framework to Executive colleagues in the near future. The framework will address the key areas of conditions or ground rules for asset transfer, information and awareness, public sector asset management, skills development, funding and whether there is a need for legislation. I will also publish the consultation responses on the Departmental website.

Social Fund Enquiries

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26352/11-15, why data on Social Fund enquiries is only available for Antrim and Lisburn.

(AQW 26771/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As part of an ongoing modernisation programme, the Social Security Agency has, over the past two years, been reorganising its telephony services. This has also involved installing a new network infrastructure, new telephony software and delivering the telephony service from a smaller number of centres. The new telephony service dealing with Social Fund enquiries is now operated from only six call handling centres, with each site supporting a number of Jobs and Benefits Offices. The six sites are Antrim, Lisburn, Falls Road, Knockbreda, Foyle and Omagh. Each of these centres support a number of other Jobs and Benefits offices.

Management information on the number of Social Fund enquiries handled by each centre is only available from the date the new telephony service became operational in that location. During the time frame requested in AQW 26352/11-15 (2012/13), Antrim and Lisburn were the only centres with the available information.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Cycling

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 25779/11-15, will they consider (i) measuring how many staff cycle to work; and (ii) commissioning a staff survey to ask what measures would encourage staff to cycle to work.

(AQW 26715/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission is committed to the Assembly being an exemplar organisation in respect of Sustainable Development and, as such, the Environmental Services Manager sits on the Stormont Workplace Travel Plan Consortium. This group looks at a range of issues including ways to encourage all people within the Stormont estate to use a more sustainable means of travel to get to and from work.

- (i) The staff survey, which was carried out in 2012, asked staff to confirm by what means they travel into work and this included cycling. At the time of the survey one member of staff indicated that they cycled to work.
- (ii) The Stormont Workplace Travel Consortium is in the process of finalising a survey which will be issued to all staff with the Stormont estate to determine by what means staff travel to and from work including cycling. The purpose of this survey is to determine what infrastructure is required to encourage staff to use a more sustainable means of travel.

I hope that this answers your question however if you require any further information please feel free to contact me directly.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 25 October 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

DRD: Appointments

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the findings by the Industrial Tribunal in Lennon-v-the Department for Regional Development, what steps will be taken to ensure that there is no material bias in Departments against the appointment of applicants, on the basis of community background.

(AQW 13169/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Commissioner for Public Appointments, Mr John Keanie, makes clear in his Code of Practice that only those individuals judged to best meet the requirements of the post should be recommended to Ministers for appointment to public bodies. He underlines in his Code that the Departments must not discriminate unlawfully when fulfilling his duties.

Transfer of Powers

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of whether transferring any of the powers, similar to those transferred to the Scottish Government under the Scotland Act 2012, would be of benefit to the Executive.

(AQW 14695/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Each devolution settlement is unique and the powers reserved to the UK government are kept under review to determine whether any benefit would accrue to the Executive in seeking their devolution.

In 'Building a Prosperous and United Community', announced on 14 June 2013, and ratified by the Executive on 27 June 2013, it was agreed to take forward further work on Corporation Tax devolution and it also indicated that the UK Government would make a final decision on the devolution of powers no later than the Autumn Statement 2014. It was also agreed that the UK Government and the Executive would examine the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers. Last year the power to set the level of Air Passenger Duty on long haul flights was devolved to the Assembly.

Certain provisions in the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, currently before Parliament at Westminster, would make reserved matters a range of functions which are currently excepted matters – the power to legislate to reduce the size of the Assembly, and functions relating to the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and local government district electoral areas. If the Bill is enacted, the Assembly will be able to legislate on these matters with the consent of the Secretary of State.

Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's role in the determination and dissemination of information on the designated days under the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

(AQW 17760/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM has no role in the determination of designated flag flying days. OFMDFM does disseminate information annually to departments regarding the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

National Congress

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 17446/11-15, on what date did they become aware that the date of the National Congress was confirmed, which resulted in the postponement of the political element of the visit.

(AQW 20153/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials were initially contacted by the Chinese Government on 27 September and again on 28 September concerning the proposed date for the National Congress.

However, we had been aware of the possibility of a Congress during the Autumn and had factored this into the planning for the visit.

Commissioner of Public Appointments: Code of Practice

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the work to date of the cross-departmental working group looking at compliance with the Commissioner of Public Appointments code of practice; and when they will receive its recommendations.

(AQW 20154/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The cross departmental working group has completed its work.

A standing Public Appointments Forum has been set up and departmental representatives have met on three occasions to address compliance and other issues.

Brazil and United States Visits

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will publish the itinerary of their trips to Brazil and the USA in March 2013.

(AQW 21015/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Details of the itinerary relating to our visit to Brazil and the USA were published by the Executive Information Service through a series of press releases and photographs. Copies of all those releases and photographs are available at the following websites:

- www.northernireland.gov.uk/news
- www.flickr.com/photos/niexecutive/sets/72157633036155586/ and
- www.flickr.com/photos/niexecutive/sets/72157632960681381

Brazil Visit

Mr I McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent trip to Brazil.

(AQO 3706/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer you to our answers to AQO 3702/11-15 and AQO 3711/11-15 on 8 April.

Brazil Visit

Mr Newton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the value of their recent business trip to Brazil.

(AQO 3709/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer you to our answers to AQO 3702/11-15 and AQO 3711/11-15 on 8 April.

Brazil Visit

Mr Hilditch asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent visit to Brazil.

(AQO 3713/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer you to our answers to AQO 3702/11-15 and AQO 3711/11-15 on 8 April.

Brazil Visit

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what benefits they anticipate as a result of their recent visit to Brazil.

(AQO 3714/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer you to our answers to AQO 3702/11-15 and AQO 3711/11-15 on 8 April.

Armed Forces Covenant

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the contribution that the Executive has made, on a yearly basis, to the preparation of the annual report to Parliament on the Armed Forces Covenant.

(AQW 23760/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Armed Forces Act 2012 requires an Armed Forces Covenant Report to be laid in Parliament each year. The first Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant for 2012 has already been laid in Westminster. In relation to that Report, our officials offered to discuss the details of the input with the Ministry of Defence. We have also asked our officials to liaise closely with officials from the Ministry of Defence on any input for the next Report and to report the position to us.

Armed Forces and Veterans Advocate

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the Executive will appoint an Armed Forces and Veterans Advocate, as is the case in the UK's other devolved legislatures; (ii) when the appointment will be made; and (iii) why an appointment has not yet been made.

(AQW 23761/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are no plans for the Executive to create an Armed Forces and Veterans Advocate. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has established an Armed Forces Liaison Forum that meets at least twice a year. This provides opportunities for representatives from the Armed Forces and Veterans' organisations to discuss issues with departmental representatives and, where appropriate, service commissioners and providers. That is the appropriate vehicle for such discussions.

Information Service: Staff

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide the answer to AQW 20172/11-15 which was tabled on 20 February 2013.

(AQW 24063/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A response to AQW 20172/11-15 was issued on 14 October.

Together: Building a United Community

Mr Hazzard asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the group dealing with flags, symbols and emblems, parades and the past, as announced in the Together: Building a United Community strategy.

(AQO 4421/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: An All-Party Group, chaired by Richard Haass, will consider and make recommendations on matters, including parades and protests; flags, symbols and emblems and related matters; and dealing with the past.

Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what were the costs associated with the proposals to develop the now withdrawn Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze/Long Kesh site.

(AQW 25225/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The estimated costs associated with the proposals to develop the Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre are £24m.

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for the Victims and Survivor Service's best estimate of the number or percentage of victims who have never availed of funding or assistance.

(AQW 25658/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Victims and Survivors Service, as part of its Individual Needs Review, asks clients what services they are currently accessing and the services they have accessed in the past. This includes the extent to which they have accessed assistance and support from victims groups and the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. The Service is currently collating this data.

Childcare Strategy

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the areas of the Childcare Strategy on which agreement has yet to be reached; and when these issues will be resolved.

(AQW 25723/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 25 September 2013 we launched the first phase of Bright Start – the Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare (A Strategic Framework and Key First Actions). This first phase of Bright Start sets out the strategic direction for the Childcare Strategy and a set of 15 key first actions. The first actions will help deliver the Executive's vision for childcare, addressing the main childcare priorities identified during consultation and research.

Childcare

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their definition of affordable childcare, as outlined in their written statement of 25 September 2013.

(AQW 26492/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our written statement of 25 September 2013 announced the launch and publication of the first phase of the Bright Start Childcare Strategy – a Strategic Framework and 15 key first actions. While Bright Start does not define the term 'affordable' childcare, providers applying for funding will be required to demonstrate that their

proposed fees reflect parents' ability to pay. We are actively giving consideration to the introduction of maximum tariffs for Bright Start funded schemes under an 'ability to pay' approach.

Ilex: Chairperson

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why they wrote to Mr Matt McNulty on 25 May 2012 inviting him to act as interim Chair of Ilex Urban Regeneration Company, given that by then they had knowledge, or means of knowledge, of the findings against him in the Latitude Report in respect of his governance role in the Temple Bar Cultural Trust; and what due diligence exercise was conducted in this regard.

(AQW 26644/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Sir Roy McNulty resigned as Chair from the Ilex Board in February 2012. Pending a process to secure a suitable substantive successor to the post through open competition, Sir Roy, with the Ilex Board's support, recommended the appointment of Matt McNulty, an experienced member of the Board to the position of Chair on an interim basis. Mr McNulty accepted the temporary arrangement in March 2012. We wrote to Matt McNulty on 25 May 2012, thanking him for his agreement to fill the position of interim chair of the Ilex Board on a temporary basis, thus facilitating the ongoing business of the company.

We had no knowledge of the report you refer to as the "Latitude Report" or any specific issues relating to Matt McNulty at that time.

Women's Centres Childcare Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Women's Centres Childcare Fund will be sustained by Bright Start: the Strategic Framework for a Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 26655/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The £12 million set aside by the Executive to support the development of the Childcare Strategy over the period 2011/12 to 2014/15 is additional funding intended to cover new childcare initiatives, not existing projects supported from departmental baselines. The fund will be used to resource the Bright Start key first actions, which reflect the main childcare needs identified during consultation. The Women's Centres Childcare Fund is an emergency package of funding, delivered by the Department for Social Development (DSD). We understand funding is currently in place until March 2014 and that DSD is currently in the process of putting in place arrangements for further funding to March 2015

Housing Executive: Management of Response Maintenance Contracts

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the person criticised for unethical behaviour in paragraph 37 of the Public Accounts Committee Report on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Management of Response Maintenance Contracts of March 2013, currently holds a paid post in a public body; (ii) if so, what posts he holds; (iii) when he was appointed; (iv) whether he has been relieved of any such posts in consequence of the findings of the PAC report; and if so, (v) which posts he was removed from and when.

(AQW 26688/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The person referred to does not currently hold a paid post in a public body.

OFMDFM: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 26951/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework is the main vehicle for delivery of the Executive's new Disability Strategy, "A strategy to improve the lives of disabled people – 2012 to 2015" and can be accessed via www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/disability-strategy-2012-2015.

The purpose of our Disability Strategy is to give coherence and guidance to government departments' activities across general and disability specific areas of policy. It provides a framework for the implementation of the UNCRPD, to take forward work to improve the lives of children and adults with a disability.

There are seven work signature projects within the Disability Strategy which will aim to achieve early momentum on delivery. The projects will deliver outcomes in the following areas:

- 1 Disability Awareness/Advocacy
- 2 Access, particularly access to Transport, and Digital Inclusion
- 3 Housing
- 4 Employment and Standard of Living
- 5 Tackling crime against people with disabilities
- 6 Access to Sports and Leisure
- 7 Monitoring and Reporting

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their Department's performance against the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women.

(AQW 26981/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 17 July 2013, the United Nations Committee that oversees the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) formally examined the UK's performance in terms of its CEDAW obligations. Officials from OFMDFM, DOJ, DHSSPS, and DSD took part in the Examination in Geneva and via videolink in London. All Departments contributed to the briefing material for the Examination.

The CEDAW Committee has now published its Concluding Observations based on the Examination; these can be accessed at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fGBR%2fCO%2f7&Lang=en

Our Department has overarching responsibility for ensuring that CEDAW is implemented here and this is done via the Gender Equality Strategy, which is currently under review. OFMDFM officials are working in conjunction with Departments to develop an action plan to deliver the objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy and the recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee will be considered as part of this process.

Peace IV: Women

Ms Brown asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they will ensure that the positive work that women have undertaken through successive Peace Programme funding is not lost if the focus of Peace IV shifts towards children and young people.

(AQO 4770/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM remains committed to ensuring the right of women to full and equal participation in political and public life, including peace building. This is a key aim of the cross departmental Gender Equality Strategy.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016 sets out an overarching framework for departments, their agencies and other relevant statutory authorities to promote gender equality.

The Gender Equality Strategy is currently under review and OFMDFM is working with the principal gender equality stakeholders, including representatives of the women's sector, via the Gender Advisory Panel to identify the priorities for women that need to be addressed in the years remaining of the Strategy.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Wildlife: Waterways

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants are available to community groups to develop wildlife programmes for waterways.

(AQW 26870/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development offers funding to enhance habitats for wildlife through its agri-environment schemes. If a community group is currently managing land under an agri-environment scheme the group may receive funding to manage habitats along the marginal area of a waterway. With careful management this margin can be a valuable wildlife habitat and can act as a buffer zone to help improve water quality.

At present, agri-environment schemes are not open to application, however my Department is currently developing a new scheme which will be delivered under the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020.

Winter Conditions

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what preparations have been made for potentially difficult winter conditions; and what liaison she has had with other Departments in respect of farmers assisting in keeping rural and minor roads open.

(AQW 26915/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Last winter we saw the difficulties that severe weather can cause our farmers. In May I established a joint DARD and industry fodder taskforce to support our livestock farmers and help them prepare for the winter months ahead. The Taskforce has agreed an Action Plan, which is available on the DARD website. I met Taskforce representatives recently for an update, and although they don't intend to meet as a group until mid winter, they will get together in the interim if a situation develops and new actions are required.

There is much that farmers can do to plan for the winter ahead, and DARD has been active implementing the Action Plan, providing advice and support to ensure that they are well prepared. CAFRE has embarked on a comprehensive programme

of workshops, advisory events and publications, helping farmers to maximise fodder production, to stocktake their individual fodder supply and to manage their stock to make most efficient use of the available fodder.

Responsibility for emergency road clearance lies with the Department of Regional Development. I welcome the action by Minister Danny Kennedy in August to seek additional support to supplement the existing snow clearing arrangements. Farmers, agricultural contractors and other owners of suitable equipment were encouraged to apply for the contract and I understand that this additional assistance will be in place for the winter.

Sport Facilities: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding offers made for sports or partial sports facilities in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26932/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No such offers have been made by DARD. The Quality of Life Axis (Axis 3) of the Rural Development Programme is delivered through the LEADER approach by seven Joint Council Committees working with Local Action Groups in council cluster areas. Down Rural Area Partnership (DRAP) covers the North Down constituency referred to in your question and is responsible for opening calls, assessing applications and awarding funding.

Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme does not provide funding for sport facilities for direct sporting activity. However, where an organisation wishes to promote a project that benefits the wider rural community and which is separate from their primary activity, this may be considered for funding by the LAG and JCCs.

In the last five years, no such projects were funded in the North Down constituency area.

DARD: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 27070/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Disability Action Plans

DARD has submitted two Disability Action Plans to the Equality Commission, both covering three year periods; 2007 – 2010 and 2010 – 2013. We consulted on both Plans with equality and disability representative groups on our consultee list and also sought the views of staff and the DARD Disability Forum. The Plans were approved by the Permanent Secretary and I, circulated to staff and consultees, and made available on the Department's internet and intranet websites along with the accompanying Easy-read versions. See the attached link for previous Disability Action Plans and annual reviews:

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/equality/disability.htm>

The Action Plans contained a range of measures including the provision of disability training, developing partnership working with others to facilitate outreach events, more accessible information services and pro-actively seeking to raise awareness of disability issues through continued engagement with the disability sector.

A new three year Action Plan (2013-2016) is currently being developed and we will continue to liaise with the disability sector during its development and implementation.

DARD Disability Forum

The DARD Disability Forum was set up in 2002. Since then through its membership, it has sought to raise awareness of disability issues that impact on staff; and to provide opportunities for individuals to have a voice in decision-making processes and to take forward different aspects of the Forum's work plan; such as contributing articles for publication, reviewing websites, consultation exercises and project work. The Disability Forum meets at least twice a year and the Forum attends the Department's Equality Steering Group meetings.

The Forum has developed its own intranet webpages and in recent years has also undertaken a range of projects most recently the review of disabled car-parking arrangements at DARD HQ.

The Forum continues to raise awareness of its work on disability issues by delivering presentations to other organisations and Departments on the benefits of having this Group.

Communication

DARD has produced a number of Easy-Read versions to accompany our documents that run to 30 pages or more. These type of publications can assist customers who may have dyslexia or a reading, learning or comprehension difficulty. The use of Plain English is also promoted across the Department.

Web authors and approvers are aware of the DARD web publishing policy and have a written procedures manual to refer to.

Training

Disability training has been provided for many of the Department's front line staff. This has included deaf and Aspergers Syndrome awareness training for DARD Direct staff, HR staff and line managers.

Named individuals have been appointed at key CAFRE (College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise) locations to help co-ordinate disability and accessibility issues for students.

Dyslexia training and training for supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities has taken place for teaching staff in the 3 CAFRE campuses.

NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013

The Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 is jointly funded by the European Union and DARD. £100m has been allocated to supporting a wide range of projects to improve the quality of life in rural areas, (known as Axis 3). These Axis 3 measures are implemented by seven joint council committees working in partnership with Local Action Groups (LAGS).

The pro-active outreach work undertaken with leading disability groups at the outset of the Programme increased our knowledge of the key issues for them and encouraged our business areas to think differently about the services they provide for customers. Significant improvements have been made to ensure the information provided in relation to the NIRDP is accessible and more widely available. We also sought to ensure that disabled people were directly involved or able to contribute to the work of the delivery bodies of the Programme and Disability Action is also represented on the NIRDP Monitoring Committee.

Work Placements

Work placements have been arranged in some DARD offices, including a student from Erne Special School in Enniskillen and two further placements for young people supported by the CEDAR organisation. A special needs work experience student was also hosted at the Greenmount Campus for a 3 day placement.

Forest Service

A new user friendly signage system has been introduced and is operational at 10 of the most popular forests. Information about the provision of accessible facilities for disabled people in forest parks has been published on the NI Direct website.

We will continue to work to improve access to services for people with disabilities and to encourage partnership working arrangements with others to facilitate further projects where possible.

Meat Products: Country of Origin

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of meat products being sold in local supermarkets without details of origin; and to outline the plans she has in place to ensure that all meat products are labelled with their country of origin in order to increase industry and consumer confidence.

(AQW 27123/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the outset I should point out that DARD is responsible for the labelling of fresh or frozen beef and veal only. All other food labelling in the north of Ireland is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

All beef and veal, sold fresh or frozen, must be labelled with the country, or countries, in which the animal was born, reared and slaughtered. This is a legal requirement under EU law in all Member States and applies also to beef and veal imported from countries outside the EU. It is enforced in the north by DARD inspectors in meat plants and by local authority Environmental Health Officers in retail outlets. Compliance levels are generally high and any cases of absent or incorrect labelling are investigated and appropriate action taken.

In relation to the labelling of other meats, new arrangements for Country of Origin Labelling are set to come into force under the EU Food Information to Consumers Regulation and will apply from December 2014. In the north, the FSA has responsibility for this Regulation.

Due to our relationship with Britain and the south of Ireland, local producers are keen to have the choice to label their food products as either "British" or "Irish" depending on customer requirements. Representations have been made by industry to the FSA, who have noted the importance of maintaining this flexibility. I have actively supported our industry in this respect by liaising with Defra Secretary of State, Owen Paterson MP, as the EU negotiations are conducted to ensure that a robust case is made for this flexibility.

I fully support the introduction of such labelling which increases consumer confidence by providing as much information as possible about food, including the country of origin. My Department will continue to liaise with the FSA on the introduction of this new legislation to ensure that the terms used fully inform customers, and at the same time, meet the requirements of industry in relation to domestic and export sales.

TB Biosecurity Study

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 16933/11-15, for an update on when the findings of the TB Biosecurity Study will be published.

(AQW 27237/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The DARD commissioned TB Biosecurity Study, which was undertaken by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, is currently being finalised and I expect the report to be published in early November 2013.

Young Farmers

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what help is being given to young farmers to encourage them to remain in farming and develop their level of expertise in modern farming methods.

(AQO 4868/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's College, CAFRE, provides support through its education programmes to those who are preparing for a career in farming with enrolments at a five-year high. In addition, last year the College piloted a programme for graduates and over 200 young farmers participated. CAFRE also continues to support farmers throughout their careers through programmes of business development planning, business benchmarking, training, and knowledge and technology transfer.

Currently farmers, under the age of 40, also receive financial support through the New Entrants Scheme. This scheme has helped young farmers to develop their business by contributing towards their bank interest rate payments. While this scheme is now closed for new applications, almost 250 young farmers received funding.

Furthermore, as part of the current Rural Development Programme, young farmers were given priority for funding under the Farm Modernisation Programme. Almost 60 percent of all successful applicants under Tranche 3 were young farmers and received support to modernise their business.

I am conscious that the decision for young people to enter farming can be complex and have an impact on the whole farm family. For this reason, as part of the Rural Development Programme, my Department developed the Family Farm Options programme. This programme provides the family with an agriculture mentor who helps them consider the key business issues.

In looking to the future, as part of the local implementation of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, my Department is consulting with industry stakeholders. The main areas affecting young farmers include additional support through the Basic Payment Scheme and a top-up to financial support available to support investment.

As Minister, I am focussed on encouraging young farmers to remain within the agri-food industry and to help them build a successful career which will assist the industry achieve its full potential.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, under the new Common Agriculture Policy, she intends to transfer money from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2.

(AQO 4873/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not made any decision on whether funds will be transferred from the Pillar 1 direct payments budget to the Pillar 2 allocation for the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme. There will be a number of factors which need to be considered before any decision is made. The key issue will be how much EU and national funds will be available for a future rural development programme. First of all we need official confirmation from Defra of what our Pillar 2 allocation will be in the north.

We will also need to look at the responses we have received from stakeholders to the public consultation that has just closed on our proposals for a future programme. We have asked a number of key consultation questions in relation to the financing of a future programme. This includes asking stakeholders for their views on which of the proposed schemes should be prioritised in the event that there are insufficient funds available and whether funds should be transferred from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 to ensure that a future rural development programme is adequately funded.

I intend to carefully consider the responses to the consultation and the outcome of the budget negotiations before making a final decision.

Circus Animals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work is taking place on a north/south basis to look at the issue of wild animals in circuses.

(AQO 4874/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Although there are no circuses based here, a number of circuses registered in the south travel here. My Department has an agreed protocol with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, which provides for an inspection of animals from these registered circuses before they move back to the south.

I raised the issue of wild animals in travelling circuses at the North South Ministerial Council, or NSMC, Agriculture meeting on 10 July 2013. Minister Coveney and I agreed that officials would investigate the possibility of an All-island approach to

the issue of these animals in travelling circuses, and that the findings and proposals would be reported at a future NSMC Agriculture meeting.

My officials met officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the auspices of the North South Animal Welfare and Transport Working Group on 5 September 2013. The issue of wild animals in circuses was discussed in detail and a number of actions were agreed to be taken forward. These include engagement with stakeholders who would be directly affected by any proposals on the use of these animals in travelling circuses. Officials will report back to Minister Coveney and I once these actions have been completed.

Common Agricultural Policy: Less-favoured Areas

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how beef cattle and sheep farming in Less Favoured Areas will be sustained following the current Common Agricultural Policy Reform negotiations.

(AQO 4875/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have been consulting with stakeholders on how we implement the reforms to create a framework across both Pillar I and Pillar II which will underpin the sustainability of the entire farming sector.

The Pillar I regulations introduce a more complex direct payments system than currently. For example, we will be moving from a single payment to a minimum of three separate payments with options for more, including the option to introduce coupled payments. We are also moving towards a flat rate support regime that is expected to cause some redistribution away from more intensive systems towards extensive production. I am currently consulting on a suggested package of measures to be implemented under Pillar I from 1 January 2015. That consultation will close on 17 January 2014. I welcome all views on my proposals.

Under the Pillar II regulations, there is a range of options which could be used to sustain cattle and sheep farming in the LFAs. These include knowledge transfer measures to enhance competitiveness, preserving our ecosystems and promoting social and economic development in rural areas. LFAs include the majority of land which is designated under environmental legislation because of its high environmental value. Many of these valuable habitats are sustained by appropriate agricultural activity, including grazing by cattle and sheep. Farmers in agri-environment schemes can receive payment for delivering environmentally sensitive land management practices.

The opportunity exists now for us all to consider the full range of options that CAP reform presents to us. Our key challenge is to use these options to position farmers better to meet market opportunities and to enhance their overall sustainability and resilience.

Going for Growth

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps have been taken to formulate and implement an Agri-Food Strategy development plan.

(AQO 4876/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Going for Growth was developed by the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) as part of the Executive's Programme for Government. The industry, through the Board, has identified opportunities for sustainable growth and targeted increased employment in these sectors and this is something that we all hope for.

Going for Growth is currently being considered by Government Departments, Agencies and the Board itself to identify the best way to take forward its numerous and wide-ranging recommendations. At Government level, this is being taken forward through an Inter-Departmental Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the relevant Departments and Agencies. The AFSB continues to meet and will be responsible for driving forward the industry led recommendations.

We are also exploring the various mechanisms that could provide funding to support sustainable growth in the sector, including the new Rural Development Programme and European Regional Development Fund, as well as Invest NI's Selective Financial Assistance Programme. In the current economic climate, implementation of some of the recommendations will be very challenging for the Executive and we will need to look carefully at the resource implications of the proposals.

I very much welcome the recently announced DETI and DFP Agri-Food Loan Scheme. Access to finance was one of the key areas highlighted in Going for Growth and this will help producers involved in integrated supply chains to access finance that they need to expand production.

As Going for Growth was developed as part of the Programme for Government, it will be necessary for the Executive as a whole to issue a formal response we to seek Executive endorsement in the near future.

Going for Growth

Mr Lytle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made on the implementation of the Going for Growth Agri-Food strategy.

(AQO 4877/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Going for Growth was developed by the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) as part of the Executive's Programme for Government. The industry, through the Board, has identified opportunities for sustainable growth and targeted increased employment in these sectors and this is something that we all hope for.

Going for Growth is currently being considered by Government Departments, Agencies and the Board itself to identify the best way to take forward its numerous and wide-ranging recommendations. At Government level, this is being taken forward through an Inter-Departmental Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the relevant Departments and Agencies. The AFSB continues to meet and will be responsible for driving forward the industry led recommendations.

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I very much welcome the recently announced DETI and DFP Agri-Food Loan Scheme. Access to finance was one of the key areas highlighted in Going for Growth and this will help producers involved in integrated supply chains to access finance that they need to expand production.

As Going for Growth was developed as part of the Programme for Government, it will be necessary for the Executive as a whole to issue a formal response we to seek Executive endorsement in the near future.

EU: Infraction Fines

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the current accumulated level of EU infraction fines charged against her Department, including the steps that have been taken to rectify the issue.
(AQO 4878/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has not incurred any EU infraction fines. I would add that DARD has never received a fine in relation to infraction proceedings.

Infractions are the legal process by which the Commission takes a Member State to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for breach of its obligations under EU Law.

An infraction is levied at Member State level and DEFRA would lead on any proceedings for Britain and the north of Ireland.

Equine Sector: Rate Relief

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the case her Department is making, with the assistance of the Equine Council for Northern Ireland, to the Department of Finance and Personnel concerning rates relief for the equine sector.
(AQO 4879/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It will be a matter for the equine sector to make a case for rates relief to my Department for consideration before any formal engagement with the Department of Finance and Personnel. My officials are working closely with the Equine Council for NI (ECNI) on the matter.

Any consideration of rates relief for the equine sector must establish the need, assess the economic benefit, be affordable, consider alternative support measures, align with Programme for Government priorities, and be compliant with EU State Aid rules.

The ECNI has recently submitted a discussion paper to my Department and this will be the basis for future consideration of the issue.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Rugby

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she is taking to increase participation in rugby.
(AQW 17879/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Responsibility for taking steps to increase participation in rugby rests, in the first instance, with the governing body for the sport, the Irish Rugby Football Union, Ulster Branch. Having said that, my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, identifies a number of high level targets aimed at increasing participation rates in sport generally, including rugby. To help achieve these targets, a Sport Matters Action Plan has been developed which outlines the key actions and steps being taken to achieve the Sport Matters participation targets. This Action Plan is published on the Sport NI website and Ulster Rugby is one of the contributors to the plan.

In addition, and in line with the Sport Matters Action Plan, Sport NI is supporting Ulster Rugby in the employment of a Participation Manager whose work focuses on improving rugby club structures, club capacity and participation in the sport. Sport NI is also supporting a Women's Development Officer for Ulster Rugby who is responsible for developing the game and increasing participation amongst girls and women from grassroots to senior level. Furthermore, under the Regional Stadiums Programme, £14.7m has been earmarked for Ulster Rugby to assist in redeveloping Ravenhill Rugby ground. The development of this facility is expected to enhance the sustainability of Rugby in the longer term and so encourage more people to take up the sport.

Salmon and Sea Trout

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how (i) her Department; and (ii) the Loughs Agency is protecting salmon and sea trout stocks along the sea shore.

(AQW 26581/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 as amended gives my Department responsibility for the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fisheries in its jurisdiction. My officials carry out a range of functions including enforcement activities to ensure compliance with domestic and European legislation and with commitments to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation.

My Department has consulted widely on a range of additional conservation measures to protect salmon and sea trout in coastal and inland waters and the draft legislation is currently being prepared. The legislation will include proposals to bring about a mandatory cessation of commercial salmon and sea trout netting in coastal waters off the DCAL jurisdiction.

The work carried out by Loughs Agency for salmon and sea trout conservation is to ensure domestic and European legislative obligations are complied with, and international treaty obligations are honoured.

The Loughs Agency has dedicated protection and conservation staff, consisting of Fishery Officers and Fishery Inspectors, in the Foyle and Carlingford catchments.

These staff enforce a suite of regulations in relation to the protection of salmon and sea trout, for both coastal and inland fishing, in these areas, and they carry out annual work programmes including scientific surveys, habitat improvement and reinstatement.

Giro d'Italia 2014

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail her Department's plans for the Giro d'Italia 2014.

(AQW 26731/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the Giro d'Italia rests with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. However, my Department and Sport NI are represented on a number of key groups, established to provide support to the delivery of the Giro d'Italia 'Big Start' in the north of Ireland next year.

These groups include the NI Steering Committee, NI Activation Committee, the Race Committee and the cycling sub group.

Through representation on these groups, DCAL and Sport NI will be contributing to the organisation and delivery of all aspects of the Giro d'Italia 'Big Start' such as technical requirements of the event, community involvement and legacy outcomes.

Cycling

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department plans to build on, and support, the success of local cyclists at world level.

(AQW 26734/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, continues to build on, and support the success of local talented cyclists through the provision of funding to the governing body, Cycling Ireland, under the Athlete Investment Programme.

Over the past three financial years (up to 31 March 2013) total funding of £660,778 has been provided to the sport of cycling.

In addition, the Sports Institute NI (SINI), which is supported by my Department, provides specialist support to local, talented cyclists in the form of Sports Medicine, Physiology, Performance Skills, including lifestyle management, Performance Analysis and Strength and conditioning.

While responsibility for the Giro d'Italia rests with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, my Department and Sport NI are represented on a number of key groups, established to provide support to the organisation and delivery of the Giro d'Italia 'Big Start' in the north of Ireland next year. My Department is also considering opportunities to maximise outcomes from the legacy of the Giro d'Italia for local communities within the north of Ireland.

SINI will also support a number of cyclists in preparation for the Commonwealth Games.

DCAL: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 26950/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The DCAL Disability Action Plan is an illustration of my department's on-going commitment to the promotion of equality for disabled people, and complements the Departmental Equality Scheme under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Plan, through the completion of actionable measures, outlines the Department's proposals for fulfilling its statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995). I am committed to harnessing the transformative power of culture, arts and leisure to deliver step changes and a lasting social and economic

transformation for all of the people of the North. My Department's Business Plan emphasises my commitment to the promotion of equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion across all sections of society.

DCAL supports a wide range of statutory bodies which are designated public authorities in their own right and are required to produce their own Disability Action Plans. The DCAL DAP therefore relates only to the activities of the core department and more information on the arts, creative industries, museums, libraries, language and sport will feature in the published plans of our Arms Length Bodies (ALBs).

It is widely recognised that participation in culture, arts and leisure activities has the potential to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities by enhancing mental well-being, providing opportunities for social interaction and assisting in the development of communication skills. The DAPs contain a range of measures designed to improve accessibility to culture, arts and leisure for people with disabilities. Other measures cover the provision of training and guidance to staff on disability and equality legislation and disability awareness. The Department has recently undertaken a 5 year review of its DAP which highlights the key outcomes and outputs achieved and outlines key priorities going forward. A copy is available on the Department's website at http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/draft_5_year_review_dcal_disability_action_plans__final_version_.doc

The Department provides details of progress on how it is fulfilling the disability duties by means of the Annual Report to the Equality Commission. There is a specific section on the disability duties within the report which is published on the Equality section of the DCAL website.

Libraries

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of users, broken down by year, in each library that opened in the last six years.

(AQW 27026/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI was formed in April 2009 and the figures are only available from this time. These are attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Library	Project Description	Year	Active members				
			Apr-09	Apr-10	Apr-11	Apr-12	Apr-13
Antrim	New Build	2010	2,166	3,567	4,098	4,111	4,147
Ballymena Central	New Build	2007	8,081	8,108	7,070	7,471	7,406
Cookstown	New Build	2008	5,596	5,800	6,885	5,528	5,333
Draperstown	New Build	2013	846	888	798	968	937
Dungiven	New Build	2012	1,157	1,136	1,453	1,833	1,713
Grove	New Build	2007	1,644	1,186	2,360	2,460	2,444
Lisburn City	New Build	2007	12,359	12,182	10,981	12,169	12,029
Newtownstewart	Refurbishment	2010	432	649	559	664	602
Ballynahinch	Refurbishment	2011	2,442	2,378	1,733	2,292	2,246
Bangor Carnegie	Refurbishment	2008	11,191	13,456	9,924	11,399	10,575
Brownlow	Refurbishment	2011	2,043	2,290	2,088	2,079	1,977
Carrickfergus	Refurbishment	2011	5,399	5,344	6,766	6,065	5,839
Carryduff	Refurbishment	2011	1,325	1,256	1,225	1,236	1,150
Comber	Refurbishment	2012	2,720	2,515	2,292	2,488	2,324
Dromore	Refurbishment	2012	1,224	1,198	933	959	1,445
Dungannon	Refurbishment	2012	5,800	6,148	11,824	4,854	6,193
Falls Road	Refurbishment	2011	1,932	2,008	3,072	2,206	2,573
Hollywood	Refurbishment	2010	3,301	3,260	2,606	3,006	3,029
Keady	Refurbishment	2010	1,395	1,313	1,424	1,630	1,614
Larne	Refurbishment	2013	4,140	4,319	4,058	4,095	3,689
Newry	Refurbishment	2011	7,281	7,579	5,714	6,985	7,124
Newtownards	Refurbishment	2012	4,463	4,174	3,452	3,949	3,508

Library	Project Description	Year	Active members				
			Apr-09	Apr-10	Apr-11	Apr-12	Apr-13
Ormeau Road	Refurbishment	2012	3,863	3,822	3,451	3,465	3,955
Rathfriland	Refurbishment	2012	1,472	1,584	1,619	1,515	1,521
Shankill Road	Refurbishment	2012	1,797	1,929	1,715	1,900	1,991
Whitehead	Refurbishment	2010	1,358	1,314	1,531	1,619	1,487
Whiterock	Refurbishment	2012	1,263	1,203	882	1,548	1,754

Libraries: Kilkeel

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the development of a new library in Kilkeel, including the expected completion date.

(AQW 27117/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The project to build a replacement library in Kilkeel commenced in March 2013. The initial construction phase is due to last for 10 months, ending in December 2013.

The library's furniture, stock and other equipment is to be installed during December and January with the new library on course to be opened to the public in February 2014.

Hydroelectric Schemes: Fish Stocks

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assessment has been made of the overall impact of hydroelectric schemes on fish stocks.

(AQW 27205/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL are routinely consulted as part of the process for DOE planning applications involving hydroelectric schemes and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) abstraction licence applications.

Each application is assessed by a Technical Assessment Group consisting of senior DCAL fisheries officers and AFBI fisheries scientists. Proposals are assessed on compliance with the relevant sections of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 (as amended) and the potential impact of abstraction operations on the fisheries ecology and fish migratory behaviour, both within and above the depleted stretch of the river.

Fish passage arrangements are assessed in operation before approval under Section 54 of the above Fisheries Act is granted. DCAL Fisheries technical staff also undertakes physical inspections of abstraction operations to determine compliance with relevant fisheries protection sections of the Act.

Outsourcing

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she intends to outsource any of her Department's functions in a bid to achieve efficiencies.

(AQW 27255/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no plans to outsource any of my Department's functions in a bid to achieve efficiencies.

Sport: Funding of Facilities

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 26411/11-15, for a breakdown of the funding received by each sports or partial sports facility, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 27360/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, has provided total Exchequer funding of £5,620,921 for sports or partial sports facilities in Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and West Tyrone in the last five years up to 31 March 2013. A table showing the breakdown of this amount is attached at Annex A.

Annex A Fermanagh and South Tyrone

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Project Title	Total
2008/09	Brookeborough Heber McMahon GAC	Places for Sport	Reconstruction of full size GAA grass pitch.	68,987
	Derrygonnelly Harps GFC	Places for Sport	Construction of full size GAA grass pitch	142,302

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Project Title	Total
	Derrylin O'Connells GAA	Places for Sport	Construction of a natural turf pitch	137,604
	Fermanagh District Council	Places for Sport	Upgrade of indoor sports hall floor at Lakeland Forum	40,082
	Tempo Maguire's GAC	Building Sport	4 room changing pavilion	245,000
2009/10	Aghadrumsee St Macartan's GFC	Places for Sport	Construction of a full size GAA pitch (138m x 88m) with fencing	205,704
	Aghaloo O'Neills GFC	Places for Sport	New grass (sand carpet) training pitch with floodlights	245,000
	An Maigh Tir Na nOg GAC	Places for Sport	Floodlighting to training pitch	97,329
	Ballinamallard United FC	Places for Sport	Floodlighting to main full size pitch	132,978
		Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities Programme	87,050
	Dungannon Golf Club	Awards For Sport	Introducing Golf to Schools, Girls specifically and Special needs Students	2,082
	Dungannon RFC	Awards For Sport	PAD Programme (Player Analysis & Development Programme)	2,500
	Dungannon Swifts FC	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities Programme	232,000
	Dungannon Thomas Clarke GFC	Places for Sport	Construction of second full size grass pitch including floodlights and fencing,	226,675
	Eglis St Patricks GAC	Places for Sport	Construction of a full size grass pitch and floodlights	245,000
	Fermanagh District Council	Places for Sport	Bawnacre Centre - Construction of 3G pitch with floodlighting	172,702
2010/11	1st Aughnacloy Scouts	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Construction of a level play area for children	30,000
	Campa Chormic	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchase of portable goals and Hurling/Camogie equipment with trailer.	8,556
	Carrowshee Park/Sylvan Hill Community Association	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchase of wheel away nets for Multisport use.	1,517
	Derrylin Boxing Club	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchase of a boxing ring, punch bags and additional boxing associated equipment.	8,959
	Dungannon RFC	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchasing of performance analysis equipment to help develop the performance players at Dungannon RFC.	3,801
	Dungannon Thomas Clarke GFC	Stadia Safety Urgent Works (Equipment)	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	29,628
		Stadia Safety Urgent Works (Infrastructure)	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	17,483

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Project Title	Total
	Enniskillen Gaels GAA	Stadia Safety Urgent Works (Equipment)	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	28,624
	Erne Paddlers	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchase of kayaking equipment	26,778
2010/11	2010/11 Lisnaskea Rovers FC	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Football equipment packs	4,987
	North Fermanagh Cricket & FC	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Upgrade and extension of changing pavilion	29,830
	Ren Bu Kan Judo Club	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchase of portable mats for schools programme.	4,000
	St Molaise GAC (Irvinestown)	Stadia Safety Urgent Works (Infrastructure)	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	28,515
	The Sports Centre Management Group	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Purchase of 14 spin cycles	8,400
2011/12	Aughintober Regeneration	Sport Matters: Community Capital Programme	Construction of 3G synthetic pitch (70m x 40) with floodlights and fencing.	235,667
	Omagh District Rifle and Pistol Club	Sport Matters: Community Capital Programme	Replacement of nissen with a newly developed 25m full bore indoor shooting range plus electronic targeting systems and scoring systems to aid and improve performance. To inc kitchen, classroom, toilets.	245,000
2012/13	Portora Royal Grammar School	Ring Fenced	purchase of 1 coxless four / quadruple scull, 1 pairs/double sculls, 2 coxboxes, 1 safety / coaching boats, 1 section of 14.3x2.4m launch jetty and 10 rowing machines / ergometers	50,000
Grand Total				3,044,740

West Tyrone

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Project Title	Total
2008/09	Dergview FC	Places for Sport	Installation of floodlighting to full size soccer grass pitch	152,084
	Drumragh Sarsfields GAC	Building Sport	2nd full-size floodlit pitch; and 2 storey four room changing pavilion with ancillary services.	798,000
	Strabane District Council	Building Sport	Upgrade of current pitch to a natural grass surface (with floodlights) and upgrade of small training area	175,585

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Project Title	Total
2009/10	Beragh Clay Target Club	Awards For Sport	Beginners & Juniors Project (Upgrade)	3,200
	Beragh Red Knights GAC	Awards For Sport	Coaching Excellence	3,697
	Bready Cricket Club	Awards For Sport	Healthy Minds & Healthy Bodies	9,689
	Clann na nGael Aughnabrack	Places for Sport	Construction of a MUGA (70m x 40m) with floodlighting and fencing	235,000
	Dromore St Dympna GFC	Building Sport	Reviewed application following rejection of original Stage 1 application BS/2528. 2nd training pitch with floodlighting and fencing.	230,000
	Drumragh Sarsfields GAC	Awards For Sport	From Cradle to Success	2,837
	Eskra Childcare Ltd	Awards For Sport	Develop Multi-use Games Area	10,000
	Eskra Community Association	Awards For Sport	Eskra Fitness Suite	10,000
2009/10	Fintona Pearses GAC	Places for Sport	Construction of a full size training grass pitch (136mx86m) with floodlights.	245,000
	Omagh Boys and Girls Club	Awards For Sport	Multisport training facility	4,500
	Omagh Golf Club	Awards For Sport	Junior and Ladies Golf Development Project	3,310
	Omagh Youth & Community Trust	Places for Sport	Construct a multi purpose training facility to accommodate boxing and a range of fitness programmes.	192,700
	St Euenes GAC (Castlederg)	Awards For Sport	Staying Active Staying Well Programme	1,285
		Places for Sport	Construction of a 4 changing room pavilion.	220,000
	St Eugene's GFC	Awards For Sport	Newtownstewart St Eugene's Fit For Life	2,500
	Strabane District Council	Places for Sport	Upgrade of existing athletic track at Melvin Sports Complex.	112,439
	Tattyreagh St Patrick's GAC	Awards For Sport	Community Fitness Suite	9,600
	Tyrone GAA County Board	Awards For Sport	1. Promoting and developing Gaelic Games at all levels within the County. 2. Enhancing the performance of our elite athletes	7,300
2010/11	Aghyaran Development Association	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Community GYM project.	30,000
	Dromore Education & Community Partnership	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Equipment - Provision of Spin Bikes for schools programme and community programme	9,432
	Newtownstewart Golf Club	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Construction of natural turf short games skills practice area	8,490

Year	Organisation Name	Programme	Project Title	Total
	Omagh Academicals RFC	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Upgrade of changing facilities to include 2 female changing	29,234
	Omagh Golf Club	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Golf teaching bays, ball dispenser,	29,959
2011/12	Omagh Riding For The Disabled Association	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Upgrade and relaying of riding arena from sand to rubber surface and purchase of show jumps.	9,024
	St Enda's (Omagh)	Stadia Safety Urgent Works (Equipment)	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	6,460
		Stadia Safety Urgent Works (Infrastructure)	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	24,856
	Strabane Athletic FC	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	Applicant received storage container from TNOC	0
Grand total				2,576,181

Cultural Awareness Strategy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action she has taken as part of the Cultural Awareness Strategy. (AQO 4846/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department provides funding up to £37,500 per annum for each of the two projects over the 3 year Cultural Awareness Strategy which seeks to reduce distrust and misunderstanding by:

- delivering 4 events to organisations/groups linked to their declared community but outside of its own membership;
- delivering 8 events to organisations/groups linked to the other cultural tradition funded by this strategy; and
- all events must be open to persons of all Section 75 categories.

Under the umbrella of my Department's Strategy the two organisations continue to engage in positive dialogue with each other when delivering their projects and have organised and delivered their first joint good relations event. I was delighted to attend and open the event which was delivered in March 2013 at the Magee Campus in Derry under the City of Culture celebrations to local school children in year 11 and above. Plans are under way for the organisations' second joint good relations event which I look forward to.

Angling

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the success of the recent World Youth Trout Angling Competition, for an update on any plans to have similar angling events, particularly using Loughmacrory. (AQO 4838/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department was pleased to support the 12th World Youth Fly Fishing Championships, which were held at a number of angling venues across Ireland. The event was a major success and attracted teams, managers and supporters from across the globe, including South Africa, the United States, France and Poland, with a resultant benefit for the local economy.

This was also the first fishing competition in which the three regulatory bodies for angling in Ireland, DCAL, the Loughs Agency and Inland Fisheries Ireland, came together to showcase the angling product in Ireland. I was pleased that Lough Macrory was one of the six locations used in the Championships. The Lough offers excellent facilities for local and visiting anglers and I am keen that we use this venue in future events.

My officials will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Loughs Agency, Inland Fisheries Ireland and Tourism Ireland to promote fishing and in utilising the excellent facilities available.

Irish Language Academy

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the proposal for an Academy for the Irish Language, specifically whether the proposals include a building where the Academy will be based.

(AQO 4843/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have commissioned a feasibility study to examine the possibility of establishing an Irish Language Academy.

The study will consider the strategic rationale for creating an Irish Language Academy, its potential role and the process through which it might be established. The study will assess ways in which the proposed Academy could complement the work of other Irish Language organisations and colleges and a potential location.

The study will also consider how the Academy could:

- Make the Irish Language more accessible to all.
- Establish a uniform spoken curriculum which provides consistency in content, teaching strategies, resources and assessment across the north.
- Address the gap in provision of the development of the Irish Language on a non-academic basis.
- Address the discrepancy between knowledge of the language and spoken usage.
- Provide support to the parents of Irish-medium children.
- Provide training, resources, quality assurance for Irish language classes across the north.
- Contribute to reducing poverty and addressing social exclusion.

The study will commence by the end of October and will take 6 -8 weeks to complete.

A detailed Business Case will then be developed to identify a preferred option and secure the necessary funding.

Television Funding

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department, or the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, has met with the BBC since the Director General announced a 20 per cent increase in television funding for the arts.

(AQO 4844/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither myself nor the Arts Council have met with the BBC since the Director General's announcement on 6 October. At this early stage we don't have any specific information about the impact on local programme-making and other BBC activities in the North of Ireland. I have, however, asked the BBC to keep me updated on developments, including any new funding and/or creative opportunities.

I have had a series of meetings with stakeholders including BBC NI to discuss how the commissioning of locally made programmes can be increased and how opportunities for local companies in this area might be improved.

It is my intention to hold a symposium in early/mid 2014 to bring broadcasters and the creative industries sector together to help connect companies and create cohesiveness within the sector.

Salmon: Catch and Release

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has reached a decision in relation to controlling the return of injured and damaged fish to waters, through her mandatory Catch and Release legislation, due to be implemented in 2014.

(AQO 4845/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials are currently assessing the responses submitted as part of the recent consultation on draft legislation on salmon conservation measures which closed on 27 September 2013. This will inform the draft legislation that will be brought before this house in the near future.

In relation to the matter of injured or damaged fish, the current guidance issued by my Department on catch and release for salmon indicates that all salmon caught should be returned to the water, regardless of condition. If this advice is followed, any fish that do not survive will be the subject of natural processes within the river.

I believe that this position provides the best protection for our salmon stocks in that there is no grey area that may be exploited by the small minority of individuals who would wish to continue killing salmon.

Windsor Park

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of Windsor Park.

(AQO 4847/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Provided that significant delays around any legal challenges are avoided and IFA provide assurance to DCAL that appropriate governance and accountability structures are in place, then the Windsor Park development can remain on programme.

The IFA IST tenders were returned on 23rd September 2013 and are currently being assessed with a view to appointing the contractor in the near future, subject to the necessary assurances being received around IFA governance.

Sport: Major Events

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the efforts her Department is currently making to secure major sporting events.

(AQO 4848/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department continues to work closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry (DETI), who have responsibility, in the first instance, for the funding of events – including major sports events. For example, my Department and Sport NI have key roles to play with regard to the local arrangements for the Giro d'Italia next year. I have also been in discussions with DETI and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) to see how we can all work together to bring the Rugby World Cup to Ireland in the future.

In addition, Sport NI's International Sports Events Programme, a one year pilot programme, will provide funding totalling just over £200k to support six international events being held here during this financial year. This purpose of this programme is to complement the funding already provided by DETI.

We have proved already that we can stage world-class events, the World Police and Fire Games (WPFG) was the largest sporting event ever held in the north of Ireland. We have a lot to look forward to in the future, especially with the ongoing development of our new stadia at Ravenhill, Casement Park and Windsor Park. However, we also have to be realistic for our future aspirations.

As a first step, and to build on the success of the WPFG, the Senior Sports Coordinator responsible for the WPFG will be carrying out work on my behalf in the coming months which will include identifying further opportunities for major sporting events. He will report back to me in early 2014.

iPad Scheme

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans for the further development of the iPad scheme for areas of multiple deprivation.

(AQO 4850/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: During this financial year my Department will provide start-up support to several pilot community initiatives across Belfast to highlight the benefit of mobile technologies in supporting numeracy, literacy, lifelong learning and health and wellbeing.

Digital technologies and innovative approaches to learning can transform the way young people engage with education and formal learning. The initial pilot in Lower Falls is helping several primary schools to introduce new approaches to transforming the confidence and motivation of children.

Other projects in development will test similar approaches to enhancing the education, social and emotional skills of pupils and involve parents and communities. These will support activities inside and outside the classroom and stimulate broader community based approaches.

All these projects will be supported by my Department's learning strategy and will involve the resources and activities of sponsored bodies across the DCAL family.

Angling

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the plans she has to deal with unlicensed angling at departmental controlled waters.

(AQO 4851/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is empowered through the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 to protect and conserve salmon and inland fisheries throughout the DCAL jurisdiction. Under this legislation any individual fishing any water across the North is required to be in possession of an appropriate licence and failure to do so constitutes an offence.

DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers undertake regular patrols on land, rivers, lakes and coastal areas throughout the DCAL operational area. They also carry out intelligence led operations, to detect, disrupt and deter those involved in illegal fishing activities.

In the case of the Public Angling Estate waters controlled by my Department, Fisheries Protection Officers also check that anglers are in possession of an appropriate DCAL permit and regulations governing methods of fishing and size and bag limits are adhered to.

My staff also work closely with local angling clubs, many of which have Private Water Bailiffs, and play an important role in supporting the Department in combating illegal fishing activities.

Common Funding Formula

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on any discussions she has had with the Minister of Education on the proposals within the Putting Pupils First: Reforming the Common Funding Scheme regarding Sports and

Premises, whereby the proposed new Common Funding Formula would distribute funding according to pupil, rather than institutional, need.

(AQO 4849/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had no discussions with the Minister of Education on the Department of Education's proposals within the 'Putting Pupils First' policy. However, my Department continues to work collaboratively with the Department of Education (DE) through the Sport Matters Strategy.

DE is represented on the Sport Matters Monitoring Group which meets twice a year and which I chair. As a result of these meetings, it has been agreed that DE and Sport NI will work together to provide advice to schools and organisations with the aim of improving community use of school facilities. In taking this forward, separate, but complementary, guidance documents are currently being prepared by Sport NI and DE and I hope, along with Minister O'Dowd, to make these publicly available before the end of the year.

Department of Education

Common Funding Formula

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he will extend the consultation period on the proposed changes to the common funding formula to allow for greater input from schools.

(AQW 26491/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Consultation on the proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme was launched on 26 June and was due to close on 18 October 2013.

I agreed to extend the consultation period for a further week until Friday, 25 October. I am delighted at the very high level of response to this consultation. It is important that voices are heard and that has clearly happened.

Common Funding Formula

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what formula has been used to calculate the financing of schools under the proposed changes to the Common Funding Formula.

(AQW 26711/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the proposals for changes to the Common Funding Scheme were detailed in the letters to schools and consultees and within the Reform of the Common Funding Scheme Consultation documentation – these documents are also available on the Department's website www.deni.gov.uk/june-2013-common-funding-scheme-consultation.

The existing Common Funding Formula, incorporating my proposed changes as outlined in the consultation document, was used as the basis for calculating indicative budgets for schools.

These indicative budgets - made available as part of the consultation documentation, used the same data (including pupil data from the October 2012 schools' census) that was used to calculate actual budgets for schools in the 2013/14 financial year. The indicative budgets include my proposals for change as detailed in the consultation documentation and which can be accessed via the website.

Education Other than at School: Facilities

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of referrals to Education Other Than At School facilities in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) Education and Library Board area; and (ii) referral type.

(AQW 26898/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) vary between each Education and Library Board and all Boards hold this information in different formats. The number of referrals by each Board over the last five years, broken down by the referral categories they utilise, is detailed below.

Referrals to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) by referral type.

Categories of referrals are:

- 1 children with **medical needs including mental health needs**; and
- 2 children with **social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties including those expelled from school**.

Category Number	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013
1	596	881	745	848	932
2	269	245	201	194	186

Category Number	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013
Totals	865	1126	946	1042	1118

Referrals to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) within the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) by referral type.

Categories of referrals are:

- 1 Children with medical needs including mental health needs; and
- 2 Children with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Category Number	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013 - date
1	61	204	163	178	74
2	0	49	69	59	0
Totals	61	253	232	237	74

Referrals to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) within the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) by referral type.

Categories of referrals are:

- 1 Year 11 pupils who are currently out of mainstream education and are not registered with a school:
 - Students who are expelled; and
 - Students who are on tuition due to an inability to secure an appropriate school placement.
- 2 Year 11 pupils who are at risk of, or in the process of being expelled;
 - Students for whom a pre-expulsion consultation meeting has taken place; and / or
 - Students who have received significant NEELB Behaviour Support Services at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.
- 3 Year 11 pupils who are persistent absentees with an attendance below 60% in the preceding two terms. Priority will be given to students who are the subject of Education Supervision Orders.
- 4 Year 11 Pupils who have been referred by other statutory agencies.

Category Number	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013
1	6	4	11	11	8
2	34	24	19	17	14
3	20	20	19	17	13
4	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	60	48	49	45	35

Referrals to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) within the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) by referral type.

Categories of referrals are:

- 1 children with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties;
- 2 children who have been expelled from school and failed to access a new school place; and
- 3 children not registered with a school.

Category Number	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013 - date
1	131	128	104	105	63
2	3	2	5	5	2
3	4	0	1	1	0
Totals	138	130	110	111	65

Referrals to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) within the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) by referral type.

Categories of referrals are:

- 1 children with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties; and
- 2 children who have been expelled from school and failed to access a new school place.

Category Number	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013
1	186	204	165	136	122
2	10	8	13	16	21
Totals	196	212	178	152	143

Education Other Than at School: Facilities

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the categories of referrals to Education Other Than At School facilities; and how success is measured for each child and facility.

(AQW 26899/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) vary between each Education and Library Board. All Boards monitor and measure the progress of each EOTAS pupil against a range of criteria, using these to determine the success of the placement for the individual child and, when aggregated, to assess the overall effectiveness of each EOTAS centre. As the criteria, again, vary between the Boards, details of the information provided by each is included below.

Within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) the categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) are:

- 1 Children with medical needs including mental health needs; and
- 2 Children with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties including those expelled from school.

Measures of Success within BELB.

The success of the EOTAS facilities are subject to inspection by ETI. In addition, all BELB managed services and community providers with whom the board has a service level agreement, provide reports on individual pupil progress on a monthly basis to the Options Panel, BELB for their consideration. Success is based on improved attendance, improved engagement with the education process, enhanced attainments, external accreditation and improved relationships with others. The Options Panel also monitors placement following yr 12 where success criteria is based on the young people gaining employment and/or continuing education. An annual report on EOTAS provision is prepared for board members.

Within the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) the categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) are:

- 1 Children with medical needs including mental health needs; and
- 2 Children with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Measures of Success within SEELB.

- Provision for Learning.
- Leadership and Management.
- Engagement and achievements awarded in the curriculum appropriate to ability and time available.
- Participation in support services offered.
- Participation and achievement in extra curricular activities appropriate to their individual needs.
- Preparation for the future, engagement with the careers service, world of work etc.
- Improvement in self esteem, group participation and independent learning skills etc.

Within the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB), the categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) are:

- 5 Year 11 pupils who are currently out of mainstream education and are not registered with a school:
 - Students who are expelled; and
 - Students who are on tuition due to an inability to secure an appropriate school placement.

- 6 Year 11 pupils who are at risk of, or in the process of being expelled;
 - Students for whom a pre-expulsion consultation meeting has taken place; and / or
 - Students who have received significant NEELB Behaviour Support Services at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.
- 7 Year 11 pupils who are persistent absentees with an attendance below 60% in the preceding two terms. Priority will be given to students who are the subject of Education Supervision Orders.
- 8 Year 11 Pupils who have been referred by other statutory agencies.

Measures of success within NEELB.

The programme across the various types of EOTAS provision is developed and teaching differentiated to support the individual needs and abilities of each pupil.

Success measured for each pupil:

- Level of engagement/attendance;
- Participation in range of opportunities provided through the programme;
- Development of personal social vocational and lifeskills;
- Increase in self-esteem and self confidence;
- Progression in core skill areas;
- Clarification of career path/positive destinations after leaving;
- Qualifications obtained;
- Development and progress of targets identified in Individual Behaviour Plans, IEPs which are reviewed & monitored regularly through the statutory functions and processes of the SEN Code of Practice;
- Centre daily/weekly/term reporting systems;
- Liaising & review arrangements in place between schools and service; and
- The use of assessment tools e.g. Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System (ABAS) 2

Success of Facility measured in terms of:

- Quality, range and breadth of physical resources available, both internal and external;
- Safety considerations - proximity to road, site location;
- Affordability/Value for money (Priority to Board owned premises);
- Accessibility;
- Neutrality;
- Potential for further development; and
- Review and monitoring systems in place through the Managers of Behaviour Support Service meetings.

Within the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) the categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) are:

1. Children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; and
2. Children who have been expelled and failed to access a new school place.

Measures of Success within SELB.

Success is measured for each young person by the creation of an individual behaviour or education plan, which includes specific targets. The targets are regularly reviewed and scored. Areas of success which are measured include:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Engagement in learning | ■ Emotional stability |
| ■ Adjustment to learning environment | ■ On task behaviour |
| ■ Age appropriate awareness and knowledge of self | ■ Compliance |
| ■ Skills to make and maintain relationships | ■ Independent learning. |
| ■ Appropriate relationships with peers | ■ Connection with peers |
| ■ Appropriate relationships with adults | ■ Appropriate self-esteem, resilience and confidence enabling reintegration |
| ■ Engagement with family members | ■ Curricular attainments/progress |
| ■ Engage in social situations | ■ Achievement of external assessments |
| ■ Awareness of behavioural outcomes | |
| ■ Self-monitoring skills | |

Success for each facility is measured by young people attendance, engagement and progress on targets. Success is evidenced by:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ■ Baseline assessment/retest results | ■ Examination results |
| ■ Pupil/parent/school comments | ■ Results of accredited achievements |
| ■ Survey results | ■ ETI inspection report |
| ■ Attendance figures | ■ Changes in behaviour and attitudes |

Within the Western Eastern Education and Library Board (WELB) the categories of referral to Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) are:

- 1 Children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; and
- 2 Children who have been expelled and failed to access a new school place.

Measures of Success within WELB.

Success is measured for each young person by the creation of an individual behavior or education plan, which includes specific targets. The targets are regularly reviewed and scored. Areas of success which are measured include:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Engagement in learning | ■ Self-monitoring skills |
| ■ Adjustment to learning environment | ■ Emotional stability |
| ■ Age appropriate awareness and knowledge of self | ■ On task behaviour |
| ■ Skills to make and maintain relationships | ■ Compliance |
| ■ Appropriate relationships with peers | ■ Independent learning. |
| ■ Appropriate relationships with adults | ■ Connection with peers |
| ■ Engagement with family members | ■ Appropriate self-esteem, resilience and confidence enabling reintegration |
| ■ Engage in social situations | ■ Curricular attainments/progress |
| ■ Awareness of behavioural outcomes | ■ Achievement of external assessments |

Success for each facility is measured by young people attendance, engagement and progress on targets. Success is evidenced by:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ■ Baseline assessment/retest results | ■ Examination results |
| ■ Pupil/parent/school comments | ■ Results of accredited achievements |
| ■ Survey results | ■ ETI inspection report |
| ■ Attendance figures | ■ Changes in behaviour and attitudes |

Winter Conditions

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what preparations his Department has made for potentially difficult winter conditions. (AQW 26914/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In preparation for winter 2013/14 the Department of Education's Estate Operations Team (EOT) has protocols in place and will be confirming emergency contact details with the five Education and Library Boards and obtaining a signed Severe Weather Impact Assurance Statement. During any periods of severe weather EOT liaise with the Department's Civil Contingencies Group (NI) representative to appraise them of all issues within the schools estate.

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have produced guidance for schools, parents and school transport companies in relation to the safety of eligible pupils during 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 ELBs will maintain effective communication links with all relevant agencies and with the media who provide the public with details of significant school closures as a result of bad weather conditions.

I understand that Translink which is contracted to provide school transport services 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 and an early warning strategy has also been put in place to ensure that Translink is notified as soon as possible of school closures.

At school level, schools should have in place an action plan which details how their school will deal with any exceptional closures which may arise during the school year due to extreme weather conditions such as severe cold weather or flooding. Each year the Department of Education writes to schools during the first term of the school year to remind them of this

requirement and to ask that they review their plan well in advance of the onset of adverse weather. This year this reminder was also issued via C2k's teacher exchange.

Schools have also been reminded about the availability on the Department's website of a Principal's Checklist. Produced by the Working Group on School Opening and Closures Arrangements which was established following the severe weather back in 2010, this checklist, developed in conjunction with the Health and Safety Officers from the Education and Library Boards, outlines the main factors that Principals need to consider when making decisions about a possible school closure.

From the 2013/14 school year, schools can avail of a texting service which could help with school communication with parents and teachers. This service is available through the C2k ICT managed service for all schools. Schools can purchase texts in advance from the text service provider.

Schools: Emergency Repairs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what provision his Department has in place for schools that need emergency repairs, such as rotten floors or leaking roofs.
(AQW 26919/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and library Boards are responsible for the maintenance of schools in the controlled and maintained sectors. Each board has a documented procedure by which schools report emergency situations using a helpline.

As part of their total maintenance budget each board has a response maintenance budget to meet the cost of emergency repairs. In the June 2013 Monitoring Round I was successful in obtaining an additional earmarked £10m for maintenance bringing the total 2013/14 maintenance budget to £47.04m.

Maintenance of Voluntary Grammar (VGS) and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools is primarily the responsibility of the schools themselves, with the cost being met from the schools' recurrent budget.

Cycling Proficiency

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what provision is available in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools for the teaching of cycling proficiency.
(AQW 26933/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) Area of Learning at primary level and the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) Area of Learning at post-primary level pupils are provided with the opportunity to learn about road safety. However, the specifics of what is taught under each Area of Learning is a matter for each teacher/school, this would include any decision to offer cycling proficiency.

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme is offered by the Department of Environment (DOE) to every primary school in the north of Ireland. In February each year DOE's Road Safety Education Officers write to every primary and special school to promote the scheme. Approximately 62% (539) Primary Schools with an average of 8,365 children are trained through the Cycling Proficiency Scheme each year. It is delivered mostly to children in Primary 7, although some schools do offer the scheme to Primary 6 and occasionally Primary 5 children. The Department of Environment does not currently offer cycling safety training in post primary schools. The decision to take up the offer of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme lies with individual schools.

Phoenix Integrated Primary School, Cookstown

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed building work at Phoenix Integrated Primary School, Cookstown.
(AQW 27020/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the initial work was approved the school has requested a number of additional modifications to the scheme including additional teaching space, alterations to the dining room and an extension to the multi-purpose hall.

As the school must comply with Public Procurement Policy and Guidance on increasing professional fees as directed by the Procurement Board and the Central Procurement Directorate within the Department of Finance and Personnel, the latest request for modification must be progressed as a Single tender action. A business case requesting approval to this course of action outlining value for money benefits and continuity of the works has been compiled and is under consideration.

Teachers: Return to Employment

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education what assistance is offered to experienced teachers returning to seek employment locally, who due to their age and higher pay scale, are having difficulties securing any temporary or permanent teaching positions.
(AQW 27077/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While the Department of Education does not employ teachers in the north of Ireland and therefore does not manage the recruitment of teachers in schools, my Department has for many years encouraged schools to employ either newly qualified teachers or experienced non-retired teachers. The appointment of teaching staff should be based on merit and suitability for the post and adhere to equal opportunities and fair employment legislation. In addition to applying for temporary and permanent posts advertised in the local media and on recruitment websites, teachers returning to the north

of Ireland should register with the General Teaching Council NI and the NI Substitute Teachers Register in order to avail of possible substitute teaching opportunities. The Department's funding of substitute teachers creates a financial incentive for schools to employ non-retired teachers when compared to prematurely retired teachers.

Educational Psychology

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail any Memoranda of Understanding, or other agreed guidelines or terms of reference, between the educational psychology service and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's educational psychology service.

(AQW 27096/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Whilst I am not aware of there being any educational psychologists employed by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), there are no current Memoranda of Understanding, or other agreed guidelines or terms of reference in place between the education and library boards' educational psychology services and any psychologists employed by DHSSPS.

Statementing

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education to detail the change in the average time taken for the statementing of children in each Education and Library Board area, over the last three years.

(AQW 27144/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the average number of weeks taken for statementing children, excluding valid exceptions, in the last three academic years is as follows:-

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
BELB	22	22	21
NEELB	20	19	20
SEELB	21	23	24
SELB	21	20	22
WELB	22	23	22

Irish: A-level Provision

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Education whether he will take steps to make provision for A Level Irish to be available to students.

(AQW 27151/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) currently offers A level Irish which is targeted at students who have English as their first language. To date, CCEA has not received any representation regarding the provision of an A level qualification solely targeted at students whose first language is Irish, but would be happy to consider any approach.

Staff: Annual Increments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when employers submitted the appropriate documentation to his Department to obtain the necessary approvals to pay staff's annual increments, due in April 2013.

(AQW 27165/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2013 pay award for the majority of non-teaching staff was agreed in July 2013. My Department is working with its Arms Length Bodies to gather the relevant information for the 2013/14 pay remits.

Education and Library Boards: Staff Increments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when his Department submitted the appropriate documentation to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval to pay Education and Library Board staff's annual increments, due in April 2013.

(AQW 27166/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2013 pay award for Education and Library Board non-teaching staff was agreed in July 2013. My Department is working with the Education and Library Boards to gather the relevant information for the 2013/14 pay remits. The appropriate documentation will be submitted to DFP for approval to pay Education and Library Board staff's annual increments, due in April 2013, as soon as possible.

Early Years Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25907/11-15, how the composition of the strategic funding panels was determined.

(AQW 27167/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Strategic Funding Panels are subgroups of the five area Childcare Partnerships (CCPs) which are co-ordinated through the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). The CCPs are multi-agency forums comprising a range of relevant organisations working in childcare and family support with children aged 0-14 years and their families.

The Strategic Funding Panels comprise representation from key stakeholder sectors including health, social services, training and employment, education and the community and voluntary sector.

Applications for the DE Early Years Fund were previously considered by a single Regional Panel comprising representatives from the area CCP Strategic Funding Panels. For 2013/14 Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) requested that all five area CCP Strategic Funding Panels should have a role in the assessment of applications. Due to the restructuring and establishment of the new Belfast and South Eastern CCPs (from the previous Eastern CCP), the new Strategic Funding Panels had not yet been established. A Panel was therefore convened from existing CCP members (for both areas) in order to consider the applications.

Staff vacancies in the Northern CCP area meant that an established Strategic Funding Panel was not available. Applications were considered by a group convened from existing CCP members.

Classroom Assistants

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25504/11-15, how many classroom assistants in each Education and Library Board have not yet signed up to have their posts evaluated.

(AQW 27168/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of classroom assistants currently employed by each Education and Library Board who have not yet opted to have their post evaluated is set out in the table below:

BELB	2
WELB	11
NEELB	0
SEELB	6
SELB	89
Total	108

Those who have left a classroom assistant post are also eligible to apply however employers are not legally obliged to seek them out. It is therefore not known how many leavers have not opted to have their old job is evaluated.

Early Years Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 26602/11-15, in instances where departmental officials do not directly advise the Strategic Funding Panels, who notifies the panels that projects must evidence financial need in their applications.

(AQW 27169/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Early Years Fund is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) on DE's behalf under Service Level Agreement.

EYO has advised that prior to assessment of the applications to the Fund in 2013-14, EYO communicated directly with the Chair of the area Childcare Partnerships to which the Strategic Funding Panels are accountable. The communication set out the focus of the assessment process which included the requirement for applicants to evidence financial need.

Nursery Assistants

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education when the issue of back pay for nursery assistants will be resolved.

(AQW 27183/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer the member to AQW 22152/11-15 published in the official report on 3 May 2013 which set out the delays in reaching an agreement with the trade unions on a composition of the job description for the post of Nursery Assistant.

Since this time, discussions between Management Side and Trade Union Side have continued and whilst a substantial level of agreement has been reached there are a small number of matters that still need to be resolved, most significantly in relation to claims that Nursery Assistants are required to provide a range of medical assistance to children.

Management Side have received support and advice from Early Years Specialists on all of these matters and are also currently undertaking an exercise to obtain practical examples of work undertaken by current Nursery Assistants from Nursery School Principals and Primary School Principals with Nursery Units that could accurately be reflected in a generic job description.

It is hoped that this exercise will assist in resolving the outstanding issues in relation to the job description. Once agreed, Trade Union Side will need to submit an associated job evaluation questionnaire and following evaluation of the post; any funding requirements will also need to be considered and relevant approvals sought. As previously advised, it is not possible to determine if back pay will arise until the evaluation is complete.

Schools: Sustainability

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to list the schools that operate, or plan to operate, under the (i) Federation; and (ii) Confederation model of schooling.

(AQW 27188/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The terms "Federation" and "Confederation" in the context of schools are not defined in law. However, the Policy for Sustainable Schools does contain descriptions as follows:-

Federation - involving small schools combining to form a single school with one principal and one Board of Governors but operating on two or more sites; &

Confederation – where schools of the same or different management types work in partnership, exchanging teachers, pupils or both, but with each retaining its own principal and Board of Governors. Schools may share specialist facilities and/or administrative staff.

Generally, a federation would represent significant changes to the schools concerned and as such would be governed by the statutory Development Proposal process. To date, there has been one Development Proposal for a federation. This was for St Joseph's Primary School, Glenullin and St Patrick's Primary School, Tirkeeran, Garvagh, and was approved in 2006.

There is currently a broad spectrum of levels of sharing and collaboration between schools and further, different models have been suggested as part of the area planning process. However, none of these are described as confederations.

There are specific collaborative arrangements currently in place for post-primary schools. All post-primary schools are members of an Area Learning Community (ALC), of which there are 30. These ALCs are not statutory bodies but enable local schools to work together, in conjunction with Further Education Colleges, to provide access to a wide range of engaging and economically relevant courses for pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16. This means that courses can be delivered collaboratively between schools and Colleges in a local area.

Catholic Maintained Schools: Integrated Status

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether there are any legal obstacles that may prevent a Catholic Maintained School transforming to integrated status.

(AQW 27189/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No. Under Articles 68 and 90 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, any existing grant-aided school, except a special school, is eligible to transform to either grant-maintained or controlled integrated status.

Advancing Shared Education Report

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education when he will respond to the recommendations contained within the Ministerial Advisory Group's report on shared education.

(AQW 27190/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I intend to make a Statement to the Assembly on 22 October on the recommendations made by the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education.

Schools: Closures

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how many of the post-primary schools identified for closure in the Area Based Plans have submitted development proposals for closure.

(AQW 27191/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft Post-primary area plans were published for public consultation in July 2012 and revised plans were released by the Education and Library Boards following my statement to the Assembly on 26 February 2013.

Development proposals for closure have been submitted for eight schools identified for closure in the plans. There have been four further development proposals submitted to the Department for amalgamations identified in the plans. These are listed in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1 Development Proposals for Closure

DP No.	School Ref	School	ELB Area
215	1210266	Orangefield High School, Belfast	BELB
213	1230173	St Gemma's High School, Belfast	BELB
228	2230111	St Eugene's High School	WELB
229	2230181	St Peter's High School	WELB
263	3210013	Garvagh High School	NEELB
277	3210233	Ballee Community High School	NEELB
236	4210262	Dundonald HS	SEELB
296	5230160	St Brigid's High School, Armagh	SELB

Table 2 Development Proposals for Amalgamations

DP No.	School ref	Schools	ELB area
243	2210312 2210305 2210080	Enniskillen Controlled Post-primary School - Merger of Devenish College and Lisnaskea HS	WELB
278,279 280	3210200 3210279	Monkstown Community School & Newtownabbey Community HS	NEELB
237	4210086 4210183	Newtownbreda HS & Knockbreda HS	SEELB
291	5420056 5230070 5230088	St Michael's GS St Mary's Junior HS St Paul's Junior HS Lurgan	SELB

BEO Project

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education whether he is aware of the Beo school based project which originated in Donegal in 2009; and whether he intends to promote this project in local post-primary schools.

(AQW 27210/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the BEO music project and understand that projects such as this can enhance pupils' music and Irish language learning.

The revised curriculum is designed to provide schools and teachers with greater flexibility over how they deliver the curriculum. My Department delegates as much funding and decision making as possible to schools, which are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils. It is very much a matter for schools themselves to reach a judgement on whether or not a resource or programme provided by an external body might enhance their teaching and learning. Accordingly, my Department does not endorse or recommend specific resources or programmes.

Organisations can contact schools directly to promote their programmes/projects via the schools data base which is available on the Department's website.

Expenditure

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget of (i) each Education and Library Board; (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; and (iv) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, for (a) 2012; (b) 2013; (c) 2014; and (d) 2015; and to detail the expenditure, or estimated expenditure, of each of these organisations in these years.

(AQW 27256/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the Resource Budget and Expenditure for financial years 2011-12 to 2013-14 are provided in the table below:

Resource (£'000s)	Budget 2011/12	Expenditure 2011/12	Budget 2012/13	Expenditure 2012/13	Budget 2013/14
BELB	254,787	251,202	253,908	252,649	249,123
NEELB	317,680	313,067	310,267	307,970	308,524
SEELB	287,354	284,449	282,163	280,754	284,994
SELB	342,210	339,537	346,405	343,295	340,354

Resource (£'000s)	Budget 2011/12	Expenditure 2011/12	Budget 2012/13	Expenditure 2012/13	Budget 2013/14
WELB	315,743	310,686	309,718	307,804	304,321
CCMS	4,170	4,128	3,163	3,141	3,262
CnaG	678	654	649	615	666
NICIE	652	643	643	638	646
Total	1,523,274	1,504,366	1,506,916	1,496,866	1,491,890

Details of the Capital Budget and Expenditure for financial years 2011-12 to 2013-14 are provided in the table below:

Capital (£'000s)	Budget 2011/12	Expenditure 2011/12	Budget 2012/13	Expenditure 2012/13	Budget 2013/14
BELB	19,029	18,381	17,072	15,928	22,240
NEELB	16,415	16,381	11,864	11,800	11,379
SEELB	10,704	9,565	9,340	9,089	14,162
SELB	12,362	12,244	11,032	10,497	8,434
WELB	5,361	5,026	8,723	8,538	11,299
CCMS	-	-	-	-	-
CnaG	-	-	-	1	-
NICIE	-	-	-	-	-
Total	63,871	61,597	58,031	55,853	67,514

Notes:

- 2013-14 figures are based on allocations made to date and further allocations are anticipated.
- Budgets for both Resource and Capital have yet to be confirmed for 2014-15.

Common Funding Formula

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount that each school will gain or lose as a result of the Common Funding Formula, broken down by Education and Library Board.
(AQW 27267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme are still out for consultation. I have not taken any final decisions on these proposals.

It is not possible therefore to provide figures on the budgets that will be made available to schools for next year, until these decisions are made. In addition, other factors, such as the increased Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) for next year, overall enrolment levels, the number of Free School Meal Entitled pupils, and the number of Newcomer and Traveller pupils etc will impact on funding levels at individual school level.

It is not possible therefore to project the levels of funding that will be available at individual school or pupil level in the incoming financial year.

It should be remembered that investment in schools is on the way up rather than on the way down. The ASB is set to increase by £15.8m next year and I have already announced my intention to inject an additional £30m into it over the next two years, targeted at social deprivation.

Actual allocations for the 2014-15 financial year will be notified to schools in the early part of 2014. They will reflect increases in the ASB in 2014-15, factors at individual school level as well as my final decisions on changes to the Common Funding Scheme.

Free School Meals: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 26066/11-15, to detail the number of Free School Meals in North Down compared to the total school enrolment.
(AQW 27313/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date figures for entitlement to free school meals relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the tables overleaf. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census which will be carried out during October.

Pupils entitled to free school meals that are enrolled in schools in North Down 2012/13

School type	Total enrolment	Free school meal entitlement	% of pupils entitled to free school meals
Voluntary and private preschool centres	413	12	3%
Nursery schools	182	45	25%
Primary schools	7,109	1,523	21%
Post-primary schools	5,579	630	11%
Total	13,283	2,210	17%

Source: School census

Note:

- 1 Figures include all pupils entitled to free school meals, including the nursery/preschool sector (whether free school meal or JSA). Special schools have not been included.

Catholic Maintained Schools: Integrated Status

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many Catholic Maintained schools have changed their status to Integrated in the last five years.

(AQW 27352/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No Catholic Maintained schools have transformed to Integrated status in the last five years.

Post-primary Schools: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education which post-primary schools in the East Londonderry constituency will benefit from the appointment of additional teachers to help children with literacy and numeracy issues.

(AQW 27516/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The post-primary schools listed below have each been allocated one full-time equivalent teacher through the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Project.

School

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Coleraine College | ■ St Mary's, Limavady |
| ■ Limavady High School | ■ St Patrick's College, Dungiven |
| ■ North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine | ■ St Patrick's and St Brigid's High School, Claudy |
| ■ St Joseph's College, Coleraine | ■ St Paul's College, Kilrea |

Department for Employment and Learning

Community Groups: Educational Training

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail what grants are available for community groups to increase their capacity to deliver educational training.

(AQW 26853/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department does not offer any grants to community groups to increase their capacity to deliver educational training. However, I understand that the Department for Social Development, through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, may consider funding where a priority need is identified within local Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans and where resources are available.

Youth Employment Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, to detail the results of the first year of the Youth Employment Scheme, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26884/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information in relation to the Youth Employment Scheme is outlined in the attached table and reflects the position from the launch of the scheme until 4 October 2013. The information is collated on a local office rather than constituency basis.

Constituency	Served by Offices	Employer Agreements Signed	Opportunities Available	Young People taking up Placement	Young People Securing Employment
North Antrim	Ballymena Ballymoney	156	230	116	46
South Antrim	Antrim Newtownabbey	123	197	88	25
East Antrim	Larne Carrickfergus	112	146	79	20
East L'Derry	Coleraine Limavady	266	315	200	64
Foyle	Foyle Lisnagelvin	682	761	437	126
West Tyrone	Strabane Omagh	118	137	100	54
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Enniskillen Dungannon	158	209	106	75
Mid Ulster	Magherafelt Cookstown	99	128	71	37
Newry & Armagh	Newry Armagh	128	314	97	33
Upper Bann	Lurgan Portadown Banbridge	282	427	222	78
South Down	Kilkeel Newcastle Downpatrick	144	190	75	15
Lagan Valley	Lisburn Ballynahinch	125	209	105	37
Strangford	Newtownards	56	102	50	23
North Down	Bangor	89	107	68	28
Belfast North	North Belfast	38	112	34	10
Belfast East	Hollywood Road	41	99	50	13
Belfast South	Knockbreda Shaftesbury Square	123	333	88	24
Belfast West	Falls Andersonstown Shankill	94	370	194	21
Total		2834	4386	2180	729

South West College: Mental Illness and Learning Disability

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 26194/11-15, to clarify why South West Regional College, in its response, included both categories of mental illness and learning disability when stating it had suitable provision, given the College has only provided for learning disabilities recently.

(AQW 26949/11-15)

Dr Farry: South West College provided details of provision across all campuses as requested by the Department. As part of the information provided, the college had included part-time provision at the Dungannon campus, which they later advised was outside the remit of the request, as it related to their work with Beacon Centres which is aimed at adults with mental health issues. The original request was in relation to post 19 young people with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. This was clarified in my response to AQW 25524/11-15.

Learning Disability: Definition

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 26194/11-15, whether he will consider introducing stricter criteria as to the definition of the term learning disability, for use across all colleges.

(AQW 26987/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department and further education (FE) colleges are bound by the definitions stipulated within the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). All FE colleges comply with these obligations and operate on a pan disability approach, which ensures that support for students is based on need and not category of disability.

Therefore, it is not within the remit of my Department to redefine these definitions.

Apprenticeships NI

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the travel and subsistence available for apprentices employed under the Apprenticeships NI scheme.

(AQW 26994/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision, with employers creating apprenticeship positions and recruiting suitable individuals as apprentices in line with future business needs. The programme aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship where the apprentice, in paid employment from day one, works towards achieving an industry-approved Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship Framework.

My Department, through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, funds the 'off-the-job' training element of an apprenticeship and provides an Employer Incentive payment on the apprentice's achievement of the full framework qualifications. ApprenticeshipsNI offers no subsidy towards the cost of an apprentice's travel to and from their place of work, training or study.

Youth Employment Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 26192/11-15, does he have any plans to carry out an analysis comparing these figures with similar provision in other regions of the UK.

(AQW 27028/11-15)

Dr Farry: Department for Work and Pensions published data on performance of some elements of the Youth Contract in July 2013. Using the published figures it is possible to make a comparison with one key element of the Youth Contract in respect of performance in securing and filling subsidised employment opportunities.

At the end of May 2013, the Youth Contract, against a target of 53,000 subsidised jobs per year (160,000 over a 3 year period), had secured 21,460 opportunities (40% of target) and made payments to employers for 4,690 wage incentive jobs. This represents 22% of places secured and 8.8% against the target.

In comparison, in its first year the Youth Employment Scheme, against a target of 300 subsidised jobs (2,500 over a 3 year period) had secured 277 opportunities (92% of target) and started 201 young people in subsidised employment. This represents 72.6% of places secured and 67% against the target.

Access to Work

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the uptake of the Access to Work programme.

(AQW 27037/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department's Access to Work programme is available to all people with a disability who are aged 16 or over, and who require specialist support to move into employment or are experiencing problems in work due to the nature of their disability. This includes support at interview, financial assistance with travel to work, and in-work support such as special aids and equipment or a dedicated support worker. The support can be one-off financial support but is more often medium to longer term assistance for the individual and their employer.

The table overleaf provides information on the number of people who have availed of direct Access to Work support from April 2013 to date and also for the previous two financial years. The table includes figures for the number of new Access to Work registered participants during the same period. It is also worth noting that an additional 230 people received advice, guidance and/or employment assessments via the Department's Access to Work team, however their workplace solutions and adjustments were funded by the employer following discussions and negotiations with the respective Access to Work Adviser.

Period covered	New Applications approved	Total number on live caseload
April 2011 to March 2012	208	626
April 2012 to March 2013	215	623
April 2013 to September 2013	173	630

Dungannon Campus: Provision for Mental Illness

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 26194/11-15, for his assessment of existent provision for Dungannon Campus for students with a mental illness delivered through additional outside funding, and the absence of specific provision for students with a learning disability, and why this differed in scale from other campuses within South West College, such as Omagh Campus.

(AQW 27081/11-15)

Dr Farry: I refer the member to the correction to the response to AQW 26594/11-15. As I have mentioned previously, curriculum offer and course provision is a matter for each college.

I can advise that, in relation to provision for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability, which my Department helps fund through the Additional Support Fund, I am content that South West College (SWC) continues to provide courses, based on local demand and viability. The scale of provision available across campuses is the responsibility of the College and is reflective of the current level of demand within the catchment areas of the SWC campuses.

In addition, I can also advise that my Department and all further education colleges operate on a pan disability approach and offer support and provision based on need, not on specific categories of disability.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Stream Call Centre

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why Derry was not chosen as the location for the new Stream Global Services call centre.

(AQW 26696/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In February 2013 it was announced that Stream Global Services (SGS) had acquired the entire share capital of LBM Holdings Limited (LBM). Invest NI had been working with LBM to secure the company's development plans for over 18 months.

At the point of acquisition LBM (operating inbound/outbound sales in the Financial Services Utilities and Telecom market) was in an advanced stage of negotiation regarding a potential property solution at the Airport Road West site in Belfast.

Post acquisition - there then followed a significant strategic review process by SGS of the LBM development plans and it was far from clear throughout that period if any of these development plans would be carried out by SGS.

On completion of its internal review SGS announced that it endorsed LBM's expansion plans and in order to satisfy customer requirements agreed to finalise LBM's Airport Road West property negotiations and implement the investment project.

Small Business Research Initiative

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an overview of Small Business Research Initiative projects.

(AQW 26821/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) is an innovative form of public sector procurement. Research from the US and the UK has highlighted the benefits it can bring to both the public and private sector – companies get finance to develop their ideas while the public sector gets more innovative solutions to its needs.

SBRI was launched by the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) in 2009. In 2010 my Department became the first in any of the Devolved Administrations to run an SBRI competition. That was a competition, organised in partnership with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, for Tourism Apps. A major joint DETI/DARD competition is currently underway to develop sustainable solutions for the utilisation of poultry litter.

In order to encourage more Northern Ireland based SBRI competitions and support more of our companies enter TSB competitions, a team of Innovative Procurement Executives has now been established. Work is also underway to introduce a number of new SBRI competitions across Northern Ireland Departments.

Business Regulation: Review

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consultation her Department has had with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on the review of business red tape.

(AQW 27003/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Review of Business Regulation is a key commitment identified within the Northern Ireland Economic Pact. Officials in my Department have been in regular contact with their counterparts in BIS as we develop the terms of reference for this review. I have been given assurances of the continued support and input from UK Government officials to this important piece of work.

We have had detailed discussions with the Better Regulation Executive and with its chairman, Lord Curry, who has provided constructive and valuable advice on the possible direction of the Review drawing on his extensive knowledge and expertise in the area of better regulation.

Economic Strategy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the commitments which are not on course to be achieved on time within the (i) Economic Strategy; and (ii) Economy and Jobs Initiative.

(AQW 27005/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The first Northern Ireland Economic Strategy (NIES) Annual Monitoring Report, outlining the extent to which NIES commitments are being delivered and providing an assessment of the wider health of the Northern Ireland Economy, was agreed by the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy in September 2013 and published on Friday 25 October.

The Monitoring Report outlines performance over the period to March 2013 and is supported by two more detailed papers providing detail of progress being made against all 172 NIES commitments and the 41 actions identified within the Economy and Jobs Initiative published in November 2012.

You can access these documents on the NI Economic Strategy website at www.northernireland.gov.uk/economic-strategy.

Start-ups

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the grants available for business start-ups.

(AQW 27013/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides an extensive portfolio of support to start-up businesses in Northern Ireland including grant support in a number of specific areas including the Regional Start Initiative (RSI) which is designed to support locally focussed entrepreneurs into self-employment. Business Start Grants are available through the Jobs Fund scheme for those people resident in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and for young people who are not in Employment, Education or Training who complete a business plan and then go on to start a business.

In addition the Jobs Fund provides employment grant support to investment projects which will create new sustainable jobs. Through this fund Invest NI supports businesses affected by the recession to provide employment opportunities, thus improving employment prospects for individuals.

New social enterprise start-ups are supported by Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme, with capability support for the business plan and initial start-up. Grants may be available to social enterprise starts should they have a level of export potential.

Propel is aimed at high calibre entrepreneurs who have the passion and energy to succeed on an international stage. Those businesses that have significant growth potential particularly in international markets will attract up to £20,000 of financial support.

Export Starts/Global Starts. These programmes are targeted at entrepreneurs who are starting an export focussed business or who have an established business and are seeking to enter export markets for the first time. These businesses are typically supported in areas of job creation, marketing, ICT, skills and strategy and R&D.

Grant for R&D is available to support the development and commercialisation of new products, processes and services to improve competitiveness benefitting the Northern Ireland economy. Grants are designed to provide support for R&D and technological innovation relevant at all stages of company development including start-ups.

Innovation Vouchers - this scheme provides a voucher of up to £4,000 to enable small and medium sized enterprises to engage with one of the 39 universities, colleges and other publicly funded research organisations throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The voucher allows businesses to access specialist skills and expertise to provide an innovative solution to a business issue that cannot be easily solved by the private sector or other support mechanisms.

The Technical Development Incentive can offer business start-ups up to 50% support of eligible technical supplier costs up to a maximum grant of £5,000. Areas that can be supported include Intellectual Property, product and process problem resolution, and improved product design and performance.

Invest NI also assists those High Potential Start-ups that have ambition to achieve £1million revenue in 3 to 4 years commercialising Intellectual Property that can compete in global markets. The Project Definition R&D grant and the Growth Acceleration Programme assist the company to discover and validate their customers. Selective Financial Assistance can be used to help accelerate growth. Invest NI also provides a wide range of other assistance appropriate for the High Potential Start-Up such as helping the companies train their staff, protect their IP, develop their management team and strengthen their board.

Separate from grants Invest NI also provides repayable support to start-ups through its Access to Finance funding initiative. This is delivered through commercially managed equity and debt funds and can help provide the money to start-up and grow businesses. Further details can be found at <http://www.boostingbusinessni.com/jobs/access-to-finance/>

DETI: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 27071/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In accordance with our Equality Scheme, my Department's annual Disability Action Plans to the Equality Commission set out actions we plan to take to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability. A copy of the 2013/2014 Disability Action Plan can be found within the Equality section of the Department's website (http://www.detini.gov.uk/2013_2014_disability_action_plan.pdf)

In addition, Annual Progress Reports on the measures identified are provided to the Equality Commission.

DETI is currently carrying out a review of its Disability Action Plans to assess compliance with its statutory requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the target date for completing the investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company, including costs incurred to date.

(AQW 27074/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A draft report was received by the Department on 1 July 2013. A consultation process with those individuals referred to in the report is now necessary. A final signed report is expected before 31 March 2014.

The costs incurred to 30 June 2013 are £1.168 million.

Airline Connectivity

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the improving economic climate, what are the prospects of increasing the number of scheduled air services at (i) Belfast International; (ii) Belfast City; and (iii) Londonderry airports.

(AQW 27145/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Improvements in the economy will play an important role in encouraging airlines to consider Northern Ireland as a destination for new routes. In terms of future prospects, I am keen to see improved access to all markets which offer the business and inbound tourism links which are important to the Northern Ireland economy. I particularly believe there is real potential to reinstate a direct air service between Northern Ireland and Canada and raised this with potential carriers during my recent visit to Toronto.

My Department is undertaking an Air Connectivity Study which will consider all potential options to improve Northern Ireland's air access position. My Department is also in dialogue with all of Northern Ireland's airports on an ongoing basis to help bring new air services to Northern Ireland and to explore opportunities to promote, and drive demand for, existing services. However, while under development, these discussions are of a commercially sensitive and confidential nature.

Broadband: Craigantlet

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there are plans to make broadband internet available in the Craigantlet area.

(AQW 27228/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As a result of my Department's investments, broadband internet is currently available in Northern Ireland, including the Craigantlet area, through a range of technologies such as fixed line, fixed-wireless and satellite broadband. Recognising that consumers' and businesses' requirements are ever increasing, my Department has initiated the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project, part-funded by Broadband UK, DETI, DARD and the EU and totalling around £19.3million of public investment. It aims to provide a 2 Megabits per second broadband service to virtually all premises in Northern Ireland, and 24Mbps superfast broadband to 90% of premises by 2015.

The proposed intervention areas for basic and superfast broadband have been established following public consultation and postcodes in the Craigantlet area are included. Details can be found on my Department's website at <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-telecoms-index/deti-telecoms-whats-new.htm>.

The procurement phase of the project began on 2 October 2013 and responses to the tender are expected to be submitted by 6 November. The time at which the project will become operational will be dependent on the tender response from the market. The target for completion is March 2015.

Department of the Environment

Judicial Reviews

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many Judicial Reviews have been taken against his Department for alleged failure to apply the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations or Habitats Regulations properly, in each of the last five years; (ii) how many of those Judicial Reviews his Department successfully defended; (iii) what were his Department's legal costs in each case; (iv) what costs his Department was liable to pay to successful applicants; and (v) what costs his Department was able to recover from unsuccessful applicants.

(AQW 20089/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I would like to apologise for the time taken to provide an answer to this question, however I wanted to ensure that the information provided is robust and accurate.

Officials have now collated information in relation to your query for the last 3 business years. Information extracted from this database records 12 judicial reviews taken in this 3 year period on the grounds of the Department's alleged failure to apply EIA or Habitat Legislation. Of the 12 judicial reviews taken on these grounds, 2 decisions have been upheld, 3 have been withdrawn, 4 are currently ongoing, 1 case has been settled and 2 decisions have been quashed.

As the costs for each case may be submitted after the judgement the total legal costs from each case are not available. However, I can advise that, to date, the Department has paid out over £353k in costs in relation to these cases.

I have instructed officials to ensure that going forward a central record of judicial review cases is held in a comprehensive manner.

Judicial Reviews

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment why he has yet to answer AQW 20089/11-15; and when he will provide an answer.

(AQW 24473/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I would like to apologise for the time taken to provide an answer to this question, however I wanted to ensure that the information provided is robust and accurate.

Officials have now collated information in relation to your query for the last 3 business years. Information extracted from this database records 12 judicial reviews taken in this 3 year period on the grounds of the Department's alleged failure to apply EIA or Habitat Legislation. Of the 12 judicial reviews taken on these grounds, 2 decisions have been upheld, 3 have been withdrawn, 4 are currently ongoing, 1 case has been settled and 2 decisions have been quashed.

As the costs for each case may be submitted after the judgement the total legal costs from each case are not available. However, I can advise that, to date, the Department has paid out over £353k in costs in relation to these cases.

I have instructed officials to ensure that going forward a central record of judicial review cases is held in a comprehensive manner.

Councils: Waste Incineration

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how much waste each local council is contractually obliged to deliver to waste incineration plants, in each of the next five years.

(AQW 26363/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is not a party to any of the local council waste disposal contracts or procurements and therefore does not have the information you request. The waste tonnage each council determines it should commit to the new waste infrastructure facilities is a matter for each council, or, where appropriate, the waste management groups acting under the authority of their constituent councils. Their decisions will be made in the context of the obligation to comply with the waste hierarchy and with Landfill Diversion targets and recycling targets.

Turkington: Planning Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment (i) why there are no minutes for the meeting on 30 March 2009 between the then Minister of the Environment Sammy Wilson, David Simpson MLA and representatives of Turkington to discuss three planning applications; (ii) whether any departmental or planning service officials were present at this meeting; and (iii) whether it is common practice for Ministerial meetings about planning applications not to be minuted.

(AQW 26374/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Arrangements for recording ministerial meetings are an internally agreed procedure and may vary on a case by case basis.

Planning: Minutes of Meetings

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether it is considered good practice within his Department to minute Ministerial meetings that concern planning applications.

(AQW 26375/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Arrangements for recording ministerial meetings are an internally agreed procedure and may vary on a case by case basis.

International Appalachian Trail

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what areas are included in the Appalachian Trail of Ulster; and to outline the benefits the Trail will bring to these areas.

(AQW 26442/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The International Appalachian Trail (IAT), which I jointly launched on 31 August 2013, has created a continuous cross border, long distance walking route that starts at Slieve League in Donegal and ends at Larne. I am delighted that partnership with the councils has enabled this project to be realised.

The Northern Ireland section follows the route of the Ulster Way with new sections in Strabane and Larne to link to Donegal and the Ferry Port respectively. Its route will pass through seven council areas; Coleraine, Larne, Limavady, Magherafelt, Moyle, Omagh and Strabane.

The IAT will continue to be developed by a Steering Group which is led by Magne Haugseng and includes representatives from the Department, the relevant councils and the Tourism Boards.

Although at the early stages, it is anticipated that this largely rural route will boost trade and prosperity in the local area it covers. Being linked to the international IAT brand will put us firmly on the map for local and international tourists such as long distance walkers, who are interested in this type of culture and who will very much welcome the opportunity to experience Northern Ireland's stunning and diverse landscape.

Mineral Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 25630/11-15, under which circumstances would it be appropriate for his Department to grant a discharge consent to mineral extraction sites which do not have planning permission; and whether granting consent represents an endorsement for the continuation of unauthorised mineral extraction. **(AQW 26494/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: The Department of the Environment's (DOE) Planning Policy Statement 11 (PPS 11) states that the planning and pollution control systems are separate but complementary systems of control and regulation designed to protect the environment from harm as a result of development and related operations.

Planning control focuses primarily on whether the development itself is an acceptable use of the land, rather than on the control of the processes or substances involved, and regulating the location of the development in order to avoid or minimise adverse effects on people, the use of land and the environment.

The pollution control regime is concerned with the control and regulation of proposed operations and processes and with their day to day operation.

As a consultee to DOE Planning NIEA recommends in its advice to DOE Planning that applicants should apply for and obtain any required environmental authorisations prior to beginning construction or operations on site.

However, in circumstances where NIEA is made aware, by DOE Planning, of an operational mineral extraction site without the necessary planning permissions NIEA's priority will be to use its legislative powers to protect the environment, where possible given the retrospective nature of the development.

NIEA will visit the site to determine if there are any potentially polluting discharges and where necessary require the site owner to apply for a consent to discharge under the Water (NI) Order 1999. NIEA will decide if a consent may be issued or not, and once a consent is issued NIEA will sample the discharge to ensure the consent holder complies with its conditions to ensure protection of the water environment.

By adopting this position in relation to such developments NIEA can bring potentially polluting discharges under its regulatory regime and therefore ensure that the water environment is being protected while the legality of the site is being resolved through the planning system.

The continuation of extraction during this time is primarily an issue for the planning system. Discharges from such sites are generally rainfall dependent therefore a discharge is likely to occur whether extraction is allowed to proceed during this time or not. It is therefore important that these discharges are regulated.

The issue of a consent to discharge is not an endorsement of the development, it is rather an acknowledgement by NIEA that the site is in existence and that there is an existing discharge that needs regulated.

Waste: Illegal Dumping

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the recent success of Operation Sycamore in identifying the illegal dumping of waste in the North West, what tonnage of waste has to be dealt with; and what will be the cost to remediate and repatriate this waste.

(AQW 26509/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The criminal investigation into this operation is ongoing and is focussing initially on two companies and their directors. The investigation has involved intensive survey work and analysis of material removed from the site. It is premature at this stage to speculate on what may need to be done in order to deal with the site.

As the illegally infilled waste is of such a large volume and in an environmentally sensitive location the decisions made and any works carried out will need to be done with extreme care and planning in order to avoid the accidental release of pollutant material into the environment. As soon as decisions can be made and costs estimated I will make this information public.

The term 'repatriation' is generally used to describe the process where illegal shipments of waste from outside the UK are removed from Northern Ireland. The term has been used to also describe the removal of illegally deposited waste from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland following its illegal deposit. The term is not relevant to Operation Sycamore as no waste originating from outside of the UK has been detected in the site to date.

Mobuoy Road: Retrospective Planning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW/25727/11-15, whether any of the seven unapproved, retrospective planning applications at Mobuoy Road, Derry benefited from discharge consents; and if so, why it was deemed appropriate to grant such consents in the absence of any planning permissions.

(AQW 26582/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am advised there are currently 6 retrospective planning applications for sites on the Mobuoy Road. The Department's records show that a consent to discharge has previously been granted for these sites.

Planning Policy Statement 11 (PPS 11) states that the planning and pollution control systems are separate but complementary systems of control and regulation designed to protect the environment from harm as a result of development and related operations.

Planning control focuses primarily on whether the development itself is an acceptable use of the land, rather than on the control of the processes or substances involved, and regulating the location of the development in order to avoid or minimise adverse effects on people, the use of land and the environment.

The pollution control regime is concerned with the control and regulation of proposed operations and processes and with their day to day operation.

Applicants should apply for and obtain any required environmental authorisations prior to beginning construction or operations on site.

However, in circumstances where the Department becomes aware of an operational mineral extraction site without the necessary planning permissions, the Department's priority will be to use its legislative powers to protect the environment where possible, given the retrospective nature of the development.

Departmental officials will visit the site to determine if there are any potentially polluting discharges and where necessary require the site owner to apply for a consent to discharge under the Water (NI) Order 1999. The Department will decide if a consent may be issued or not, and once a consent is issued the discharge will be sampled to ensure the consent holder complies with its conditions to ensure protection of the water environment.

By adopting this position in relation to such developments the Department can bring potentially polluting discharges under its regulatory regime and therefore ensure that the water environment is being protected while the legality of the site is being resolved through the planning system.

Discharges from such sites are generally rainfall dependent therefore a discharge is likely to occur whether extraction is allowed to proceed during this time or not.

The issue of a consent to discharge is not an endorsement of the development, it is rather an acknowledgement by the Department that the site is in existence and that there is an existing discharge that needs regulated.

Local Government Reform

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much it will cost to complete the reform of Local Government.

(AQW 26631/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of local government service delivery, carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years.

The Regional Transition Committee commissioned the Finance Working Group in 2012 to develop an up-to-date and accurate analysis of the full costs (transition and transformation) and benefits (including savings) of the reform implementation programme. Since then, local government has worked on this issue, and a response is expected within the coming weeks.

Dereliction Fund: Moyle, Ballymena and Ballymoney

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 25911/11-15, of the original £1.5 million allocated in the June monitoring round to detail the (i) amount of funding awarded to; and (ii) projects supported in the (a) Moyle; (b) Ballymena; and (c) Ballymoney council areas.

(AQW 26660/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In February 2013 Moyle District Council received £104k in dereliction funding (Table 1). Although Ballymena and Ballymoney submitted bids neither received funding at this stage.

In July 2013 Ballymoney Borough Council was awarded £100k (Table 2) and Ballymena Borough Council was awarded £160k (Table 3). Moyle Council did not receive funding. As Councils have until 31 March 2014 to complete these projects there is no comprehensive list of completed projects available.

In preparation of the outcome of the October monitoring round when £2m was requested for the dereliction fund, Councils were asked to submit bids by 23 August 2013. Moyle District Council submitted a bid of £125,344 (Table 4). Ballymena Borough Council also submitted a bid; however, the department did not receive the bid until after the closing date, therefore the bid was not accepted. On this occasion Ballymoney Borough Council did not submit a bid.

For details of projects supported by each of the named Councils please see tables below.

- Table 1 - details of projects supported by Moyle District Council (February 2013).
- Table 2 - details of projects included in the bid submitted by Ballymoney Borough Council (July 2013).
- Table 3 - details projects included in the bid submitted by Ballymena Borough Council (July 2013).
- Table 4 - details projects included in Moyle District Council bid for monies that may become available in the October monitoring round.

Table 1 Projects Supported By Moyle District Council

Corner of Quay Road and North Street, Ballycastle	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme, plaster repairs, remove redundant signage, clear out gutters.
Corner of Mary Street and Quay Road, Ballycastle	Apply graphics to hoarding guarding the building site and add graphics to all windows and doors of the two buildings. Apply new paint colour scheme to buildings.
Site of demolished dwellings nos. 54-60 Quay Road and adjacent 3 storey terraced dwelling	Paint existing hoardings and apply graphics.
No 16 North Street Ballycastle	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows. Clear debris from adjacent vacant site, erect fencing and finish with stone.
No. 49 Castle Street	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows.
Orange Hall (corner of Coleraine Road)	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows.
No 121 Main Street Bushmills	Create an urban garden by clearing site, erecting hoarding, applying paint and graphics, installing bitmac footpath and grass turf, planting and two park benches.
No 31 Main Street Bushmills (beside co-op shops)	Erect hoarding to frontage of site and apply paint.
Waterfoot Village (at corner of Coast Road and entrance to car park)	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows.
No 37 Main Street Waterfoot	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows. Remove existing roof and construct new temporary measure.
No 3 Main Street Waterfoot	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows.
No 49 Main Street Waterfoot	Redecorate by painting white and redecorate garage doors including localised repairs to doors and plasterwork.

Nos 16-20 Main Street Mosside	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows. Remove existing roof and construct new temporary measure.
Nos. 244/246 Moyarget Road, Mosside	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme to redundant garage and adjacent bungalow, clear site of all debris, strim grass, place rock as site segregation and new entrance chains/post.
Nos. 25-31 Main Street Mosside	Minor repairs to dormer roof. Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows.
Nos. 2-4 Main Street Mosside	Erect timber post and vertical rail fence to frontage to site including vehicular gate.
Site opposite entrance to Carrick-a-Rede site	Remove existing fence and construct ranch timber fence around site, repairs to outbuilding roof and clear site of debris.
Glenshesk Road Armoy	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows, clear out gutters.
Nos. 11 & 11a Glenshesk Road Armoy	Redecorate by painting new colour scheme and add graphics to doors and windows, clear out gutters.

Table 2 Projects Included in Ballymoney Borough Council Bid

7-9 Market Street, BT53 6EA (formerly McClarty Insurance premises)	Minor repairs to derelict building. Removal of vegetation, plaster repairs and re-painting. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated Composite Aluminium Panels (CAPs) to all existing window and door openings. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
9-11 Market Street BT53 6EA Gap Site – former public house / off licence	Erection of perimeter hoarding to corner site. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to new wall. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
20 Victoria Street BT53 6DW Gap Site – former retail unit	Erection of hoarding to front of site. Removal of tall vegetation. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to new wall. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
13 Linenhall Street BT53 6DP Gap Site – former drapers	Erection of perimeter hoarding to front of site. Removal of tall vegetation. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to new wall. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
15 Linenhall Street BT53 6DP	Minor repairs to derelict building. Removal of vegetation, plaster repairs and re-painting. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to all existing window and door openings. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
11-13, 11A Linenhall Street BT53 6RQ	Supply and fix protective marine plywood hoarding to unhoarded windows (2no) at first floor level, in readiness to support laminated CAPs to be supplied and fixed by others. Repair and make good as required, existing window hoardings at first and second floors (18no), in readiness to support laminated CAPs to be supplied and fixed by others. Design, supply and fix 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to all existing first and second window openings (20no). CAPs designed by artist, to the approval of Ballymoney Borough Council.
1-3 Queen Street BT53 6HY Gap Site – Former Church Hall	Erection of perimeter hoarding to corner site. Removal of vegetation. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over laminated CAPs to new wall. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use. This site would also lend itself to the development of community gardens with the backdrop of the tower and St Patrick's Parish Church opposite.
39 Church Street BT53 6JD Former traditional sweet shop	Minor repairs to derelict building. Removal of vegetation, plaster repairs and re-painting. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to all existing window and door openings. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.

37-39 High Street BT53 6AJ Former Cinema	Minor repairs to derelict building. Removal of vegetation, plaster repairs and re-painting. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to all existing window and door openings. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
33 High Street BT53 6AJ Gateway adjacent to derelict builders yard, beside	Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to the existing gateway. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
23 High Street Former Sweet Shop / Wool Shop	Minor repairs to derelict building. Removal of vegetation, plaster repairs and re-painting. Provision and erection of new 3mm thick printed and over-laminated CAPs to all existing window and door openings. CAPs designed by artist and themed to reflect former use.
16-20 High Street BT53 6AA	Remove existing defective decals from 4no. Ground floor windows. Clean existing ground floor windows in readiness for the application of decals, by others. Design, supply and apply decals to the face of 4no. Existing ground floor windows. Decals designed by artist to the approval of Ballymoney Borough Council.
9 High Street	Clean existing ground floor windows in readiness for the application of decals, by others. Provide access for the application of decals. Arrange for existing external shutters to be raised during normal opening hours, Monday to Saturday. Design, supply and apply decals to the inside face of existing ground floor windows. Decal designed by artist to the approval of Ballymoney Borough Council.
1 Market Street BT53 6EA	Clean existing ground floor windows in readiness for the application of decals, by others. Design, supply and apply decals to the inside face of 8no. Existing ground floor windows. Decals designed by artist to the approval of Ballymoney Borough Council.
63 Main Street BT53 6AN	Clean existing ground floor windows and door in readiness for the application of decals, by others. Provide access for the application of decals. Arrange for existing external shutters to be raised during normal opening hours, Monday to Saturday. Design, supply and apply decals to the inside face of existing ground floor windows and door. Decals designed by artist to the approval of Ballymoney Borough Council.

Table 3 Projects Included in Ballymena Borough Council Bid

<p>Bridge Street</p> <p>Strategic Development Site</p> <p>Gap site opposite The Braid Town Hall, Museum & Arts Centre which houses the Tourist Information Centre also.</p> <p>Vacant site in prominent position opposite landmark Braid building.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Environment Improvements ■ Demolitions ■ Turfing and topsoil ■ Paths ■ Vertical elements ■ Street Lighting ■ New hoarding ■ Seating and bins ■ Planting ■ Render and paint ■ Bollards and kerbs
<p>92 Church Street (McKillens)</p> <p>Derelict Gap Site</p> <p>Gap site currently screened by hoarding in high footfall location.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provision of false front comprising ■ shoring, hoarding and vinyl screening ■ Demolitions ■ Timber shoring ■ Hoarding ■ Vinyl screening

<p>Bryan Street</p> <p>Derelict Gap Site</p> <p>Gap site in gateway link between Wellington Street and Church Street in town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Take down steel stanchions ■ New brick paved surfacing ■ Render and paint to old walls ■ Power to site
<p>10 Pats Brae</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Gateway route linking Galgorm/ Waveney area of town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove defective finish, clean down walls and paint ■ Repair render to walls ■ Provide vinyl screening ■ Provide vinyl finish to roller shutters
<p>46 – 50 Ballymoney Street</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Junction of Ballymoney Street/ Alexander Street. Three derelict adjoining properties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Wash down and repaint walls ■ Vinyl screening to windows
<p>Church Street/Meeting House Lane</p> <p>Gateway Site</p> <p>Church Street junction with Meeting House Lane.</p> <p>Derelict building at gateway site at above location which is a major link from DRD car park to town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide hoarding to shop front and shop windows ■ Painting to front and gables ■ Vinyl screening to shop front ■ Vinyl screening to windows
<p>44 Mill Street</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Double shop frontage in Mill Street.</p> <p>Derelict building in otherwise well maintained area creating negative impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Repair render to walls ■ Paint walls ■ Vinyl screening to shop front and windows ■ New signage
<p>2 Wellington Street</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Corner site at junction of Wellington Street and Lower Mill Street in core of town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls and providing render at gable ■ Vinyl screening to roller shutters ■ Vinyl screening to windows
<p>44 William Street</p> <p>Vacant Property in gateway link between Broughshane Street and Ballymoney Street.</p> <p>Single building frontage.</p> <p>Negative impact on adjoining properties that had been refurbished.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls and repairs to plaster ■ Vinyl screening to windows
<p>63 – 73 Lower Mill Street</p> <p>Derelict block of properties in disrepair.</p> <p>Vacant/derelict block of properties in prominent position to gateway area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Repairs to Parapet ■ Paint to walls ■ Vinyl screening to shop front ■ Vinyl screening to windows ■ New signage ■ Vinyl screening to roller shutters
<p>26 Ballymoney Street</p> <p>Vacant Property prominently situated in high footfall gateway link between two core shopping centres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls ■ Vinyl screening to shopfront
<p>William Street</p> <p>Vacant Property in gateway link between Broughshane Street and Ballymoney Street.</p> <p>Single shop frontage.</p> <p>Negative impact on other refurbished properties in area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls ■ Vinyl screening to shopfront ■ Replace signage

<p>Alexander Street</p> <p>Strategic Development Site</p> <p>Gateway Link</p> <p>Centrally located between two of the core streets in the town centre.</p> <p>The surround has no shop frontage and is bordered by the rear of considerable properties. However car park is well used by visitors and locals alike.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pergolas and planting at Williams St. (1) ■ Pergolas and planting at Williams St. (2) ■ Pergolas and planting at Broughshane St. ■ Paint and Signage at Ballymoney St.
<p>Old Cinema Site Ballymoney Road</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Opposite Court House and Adair Arms Hotel.</p> <p>Long term vacant site of old cinema with a hoarding front.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove shrubbery ■ Paint hoarding
<p>Iceland (back of)</p> <p>Derelict Gap Site rear of Iceland building on High Street.</p> <p>Loading/unloading bays at rear of Iceland that requires visual enhancements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide painted hoarding
<p>Bus/Rail Station (Gateway Site)</p> <p>Located on main gateway on Galgorm Road and provides the link for visitors to town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Demolition and Site Clearance ■ Work to existing wall ■ Earthworks ■ Steel Edgings ■ Mild Steel Railings ■ Resin Bound Gravel ■ Unit Paving ■ Seats and Litter Bins ■ Feature Sign ■ Tree Planting (Semi-mature) ■ Shrub Planting
<p>Car Park at Tower Centre</p> <p>Gateway Site located at the junction of a number of streets e.g. Springwell Street, John Street, Albert Place with high levels of footfall accessing town centre.</p> <p>Visually is a concrete mass.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Additional Signage
<p>Bridge Street</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>This building is located beside a gap site and opposite The Braid Town Hall, Museum & Arts Centre that is a landmark building for the town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls ■ Vinyl screening to roller shutters ■ Signage
<p>Wellington Street</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>This property is situated in a core street of the town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls ■ Vinyl screening to shopfront
<p>William Street Entrance to Fairhill Centre</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Derelict building situated at main entrance to Fairhill Shopping Centre with high footfall and gateway status to Broughshane Street and Ballymoney Street.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls ■ Vinyl screening to windows ■ Vinyl screening to shopfront

<p>Springwell Street</p> <p>Derelict Gap and Site and Vacant Property</p> <p>This immediate area requires visual upgrade for visitors using the car park.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide painted hoarding
<p>70 & 72 High Street</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Corner site at junction of High Street and John Street.</p> <p>Vacant properties in gateway site from Springwell Street car park to Tower Centre with high footfall.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting walls ■ Vinyl screening to windows ■ Repairs to render
<p>Cullybackey Road at Pentagon</p> <p>Vacant Property and UNITE Union office frontage located directly opposite Adair Arms Hotel.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vinyl screening to windows ■ Removal of planting and shrubs ■ Wall and Railing paint ■ Paint fascia etc ■ Repair render
<p>Waveney Road</p> <p>Vacant Property</p> <p>Unit is located beside Fire Station and is a major link road to town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vinyl screening to windows ■ Removal of planting and shrubs ■ Wall and Railing paint ■ Paint fascia etc ■ Clean down brickwork and paint sills
<p>Waveney Road – Railway Embankment</p> <p>Tree Removal</p> <p>Main arterial gateway route to and from town centre. Railed embankment area having negative impact on area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Replace timber fencing ■ Provide planting and shrubs
<p>Pedestrian Entrance to Tower Centre Car Park off Ballymoney Street</p> <p>Gateway to and from multi-storey car park onto Ballymoney Street and is a main pedestrian link to town centre with high footfall.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting render
<p>Pedestrian Entrance to Tower Centre Car Park off Greenvale Street</p> <p>Gateway to and from multi-storey car park onto Greenvale Street and is a main pedestrian link to town centre with high footfall.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Painting render
<p>24 William Street</p> <p>Vacant Property.</p> <p>Gateway link between Ballymoney Street and Broughshane Street (former Public House)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Replace defective render ■ Paint walls ■ Vinyl screening to roller shutter doors ■ Vinyl screening to windows ■ Signage

Table 4 Projects Included in Moyle District Council – August 2013

Main Street, Armoy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows
Clare Street, Ballycastle Various properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plaster repairs ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows ■ Repairs to doors and windows
Property beside Chinese Carryout Clare Street, Ballycastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vegetation removal ■ Demolish building and provide hardcore surface ■ Erect hoarding to perimeter with graphics
Back of Boyd Arms, Market Street, Ballycastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows ■ Repairs to doors and windows ■ Plaster repairs
Old Boyles Paint Shop Market Street, Ballycastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows ■ Plaster repairs
Beside Youthlinks Market Street, Ballycastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows
Old Cinema Market Street, Ballycastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Powerwash walls ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows and doors
Vacant, Beside Shoe box Station Road, Ballycastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Re-pointing to masonry work ■ Repair door and re-paint ■ Repairs to roof
Open Space, Back Carpark Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Provide coloured gravel surface ■ Install planted beds ■ Provide post and chain perimeter fencing ■ Provide two park benches
Back Carpark (Garden and House) Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Powerwash walls ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows and doors ■ New gates to yard entrance ■ Hardcore surface to yard ■ Graphic panels to boundary wall
Beside Credit Union Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows ■ Plaster repairs
Beside Hairdressers Bridge Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Apply new paint colour scheme to doors ■ Graphics to windows ■ Repairs to doors ■ Plaster and masonry repairs

The Old Bank House Bridge Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Graphics to windows and doors ■ Plaster and masonry repairs ■ Repair downpipe
Escape, Vacant Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows ■ Plaster repairs
Vacant House Back Car Park off Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to window ■ Plaster repairs
Mace Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Paint to windows and shutter ■ Plaster repairs
Sportsman Bar Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Graphics to windows ■ Plaster repairs
Boarded up side of Church of the Redeemer, Main Street, Bushmills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remove vegetation ■ Graphics to windows and door ■ Plaster and masonry repairs
Vacant Properties (past Council bus stop) Liscolman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Power wash walls ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Plaster repairs ■ Graphics to windows and door ■ Repairs to roof
Glenariff Inn Main Street, Waterfoot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Power wash walls ■ Apply new paint colour scheme ■ Plaster repairs ■ Graphics to windows and door
Church Bay Rathlin Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vegetation removal ■ Hoarding to building complete with graphics ■ Grade and level rough ground ■ Provide hardcore surface ■ Provision of park bench ■ Provide area of planting ■ Clear debris and vegetation from area of slipway ■ Cosmetic repairs to abandoned boats ■ Reinstate surfaces ■ Provide post and chain fence around boats ■ Provide information signs relating to history of boats and slipway

Exploris: Conservation

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the proposed closure of Exploris will have on conservation issues.

(AQW 26743/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is responsible for nature conservation and delivers this through an extensive range of programmes of site designation, monitoring and strict protection through various pieces of International and National legislation. The closure of Exploris will not impact on the Department's ability to deliver these programmes.

Exploris is not involved in delivering statutory conservation work but I appreciate the work done there in raising awareness of the rich biological diversity in our seas and in providing a sanctuary and rehabilitation centre for abandoned seal pups.

I continue to raise these issues with my Executive Colleagues.

Driver Licence Applicants: Medical Assessments

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how access to doctors and consultants who care for driver licence applicants is managed; and (ii) whether decisions to grant licences are based on their conclusive medical assessments or do non-medical Driver and Vehicle Agency staff adjudicate on the doctor's or consultant's submissions

(AQW 26752/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Where an application for a driving licence requires professional medical assessment, the application is referred to the Department's medical advisors, the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) Occupational Health Service (OHS).

Where necessary, OHS will seek further medical evidence from the applicant's doctor or consultant, or refer the applicant to an independent specialist consultant for examination.

Following consideration of the relevant medical evidence, including that provided by the doctor, consultant or independent specialist consultant, OHS will make a recommendation to DVA as to the applicant's fitness to drive.

While the decision to grant, refuse, restrict or revoke a licence lies solely with the Department, in practice DVA does not act outside the OHS recommendation.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Publication

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what statutory processes are delaying the publication of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 26761/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As advised in my answer to your previous oral question AQO 4791/11-15, after extensive assessment of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission, my Department recently submitted BMAP to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) for assessment of the Plan against the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). I expect DRD's consideration to be completed by 16 October and subject to the Plan being awarded a Certificate of General Conformity, preparations for publication will commence and are expected, due to procurement requirements, to take 3 – 4 months. Once completed, I plan to adopt BMAP at the earliest opportunity.

Market Traders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment which councils have active strategies in place to protect and promote market traders; and of these, how many have staff working with, and for, such traders to ensure that they are operating in a safe environment and included fully in the local and commercial community.

(AQW 26779/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information requested is not held by the Department, and was obtained from individual councils.

Council	Is an Active Strategy in Place?	No. of Staff working with and for Market Traders
Antrim	No	None
Ards	No	2
Armagh	No	1
Ballymena	No	7
Ballymoney	No	None
Banbridge	No	1
Belfast	*Signed up to Real Deal Charter	21
Carrickfergus	No	None
Castlereagh	No	None
Coleraine	Yes	1
Cookstown	No	1.5
Craigavon	*Signed up to Real Deal Charter	1
Derry	Yes	3
Down	No	1
Dungannon and South Tyrone	No	3

Council	Is an Active Strategy in Place?	No. of Staff working with and for Market Traders
Fermanagh	No	None
Larne	No	4
Limavady	No	None
Lisburn	No	1
Magherafelt	No	None
Moyle	No	1
Newry & Mourne	No	3
Newtownabbey	No	None
North Down	No	None
Omagh	No	1
Strabane	No	1

* The Real Deal Charter is a scheme which was introduced across the United Kingdom to help regulate and protect the reputation of markets as safe shopping environments.

Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has undertaken any assessment of legally classing super pedelec bicycles, such as those permitted by the government in Germany.
(AQW 26786/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is working closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) in Britain on the issue of super pedelec electric bicycles, referred to in legislation as Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs).

EAPCs are legal and are permitted in Northern Ireland. Legislative provisions for them are contained in the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Road Traffic Order allows for EAPCs to be driven on a road by a person who is 14 years old or older. Any child under the age of 14 who drives these EAPCs or anyone who allows children under 14 to drive one is guilty of an offence.

In 2010, DfT undertook a consultation to ascertain whether to amend the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle (EAPC) Regulations 1983 to simplify the legislation and provide closer alignment with the Directive 2002/24/EC which sets a limit on EAPCs up to 25 km/h and a motor output limit of 0.25 kW. DfT issued the consultation responses in January 2012.

More recently, DfT considered the EAPC Regulations to be undertaken as part of the Red Tape Challenge (the Westminster Government's review of all legislation) and research was commissioned to understand the regulatory options available. DfT is currently considering these options and intends to propose a way forward shortly.

My Department will continue to work with DfT to ascertain the outcome of their research and determine if any changes are required to Northern Ireland legislation.

Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has undertaken any assessment of permitting super pedelec electric bicycles such as those permitted in Germany.
(AQW 26816/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is working closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) in Britain on the issue of super pedelec electric bicycles, referred to in legislation as Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs).

EAPCs are legal and are permitted in Northern Ireland. Legislative provisions for them are contained in the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Road Traffic Order allows for EAPCs to be driven on a road by a person who is 14 years old or older. Any child under the age of 14 who drives these EAPCs or anyone who allows children under 14 to drive one is guilty of an offence.

In 2010, DfT undertook a consultation to ascertain whether to amend the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle (EAPC) Regulations 1983 to simplify the legislation and provide closer alignment with the Directive 2002/24/EC which sets a limit on EAPCs up to 25 km/h and a motor output limit of 0.25 kW. DfT issued the consultation responses in January 2012.

More recently, DfT considered the EAPC Regulations to be undertaken as part of the Red Tape Challenge (the Westminster Government's review of all legislation) and research was commissioned to understand the regulatory options available. DfT is currently considering these options and intends to propose a way forward shortly.

My Department will continue to work with DfT to ascertain the outcome of their research and determine if any changes are required to Northern Ireland legislation.

Market Traders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will commission an audit to assess the level of confidence market traders have in their respective councils, including aspects around support, health and safety, inclusion, facilities, accessibility, security and customer satisfaction.

(AQW 26825/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is not responsible for policy regarding markets and market traders. Policy responsibility for the issues mentioned is shared across a number of organisations and departments. Under the circumstances, I have no plans to commission an audit of the type suggested.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Driving Licences

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment why the Driver and Vehicle Agency compels holders of a driving licence issued by the National Driver Licence Service to surrender this licence when they have been required by a local court to re-sit their driving test.

(AQW 26840/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A licence issued by any Member state of the EU, including the National Driver Licence Service in Ireland, is described as a Community or EU licence (that is, one issued by a Member State of the EU). Any person who holds such a licence must surrender it to a court when prosecuted for an offence involving disqualification.

Where a court in Northern Ireland orders that the holder of a Community licence is to be disqualified, the court must send the licence to the Department. In addition, where the disqualified driver is not resident in Northern Ireland, and the licence was issued by the National Driver Licence Service, the Department must, in accordance with the provisions of the Crime (International Co-operation) Act 2003 relating to the Mutual Recognition of Driving Disqualifications, return the licence to the issuing authority.

Failure to produce a licence to court, if required to do so, is an offence under Article 29(2) of the 1996 Offenders Order.

Councils: Absenteeism

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the absenteeism levels in each of the 26 local councils.

(AQW 26861/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This information requested is not held by the Department.

The Chief Local Government Auditor published a series of annual reports on absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils. The last report in this series was for the 2009-10 year.

These reports compared absenteeism across councils and considered the level of absenteeism for the sector as a whole when compared with other employment sectors.

For the year 2010/2011 the Chief Local Government Auditor summarised the main findings and recommendations in a report entitled "The exercise by local Government Auditors of their functions in the year to 31 March 2012".

All reports are available on the NIAO website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Ministerial Visit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 25751/11-15, whether the emails were sent to each MLAs constituency office on the evening of 10 September 2013.

(AQW 26873/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In line with Assembly guidance, notifications of Ministerial visits to constituency areas are sent to designated party contacts and not to each MLAs constituency office. On 10 September 2013, an email was sent by my Private Office to the designated contacts for each party represented in the East Londonderry area. The email contained a list of MLAs in the area and requested that my visit be brought to their attention.

Councils: Debt, Liabilities and Population

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail of the debt and financial liabilities of each local council; and the total working age population in each council area.

(AQW 26906/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The most up-to-date information for council debt and financial liabilities, as at 31 March 2012, and the population aged 16-64 as at mid-2012 is set out in the table below. It should be noted that the total liabilities column is inclusive of all short and long term debt of each council.

Council	Total Debt £	Total Liabilities £	Population aged 16 to 64
Antrim	19,817,656	30,798,393	34,300
Ards	13,752,224	40,746,691	49,400
Armagh	26,929,965	40,831,573	37,900
Ballymena	26,239,361	43,452,192	40,600
Ballymoney	9,533,362	18,569,027	20,100
Banbridge	20,704,940	29,371,493	31,000
Belfast	28,465,855	200,133,039	186,200
Carrickfergus	21,429,208	29,422,729	25,000
Castlereagh	17,856,096	31,092,693	42,800
Coleraine	35,838,783	55,631,883	37,400
Cookstown	1,450,468	8,523,104	24,100
Craigavon*	7,964,823	26,943,558	60,500
Derry	25,476,154	69,170,093	70,800
Down	23,365,257	39,941,387	44,600
Dungannon & S Tyrone	5,227,982	14,437,403	37,700
Fermanagh	3,331,959	20,693,851	39,400
Larne	15,722,967	23,076,045	20,400
Limavady	12,660,161	25,363,977	22,100
Lisburn	19,997,814	38,533,485	77,600
Magherafelt	0	8,209,278	29,000
Moyle	8,659,895	13,447,402	10,700
Newry & Mourne	18,772,166	37,930,111	64,400
Newtownabbey	46,836,936	62,788,302	54,500
North Down	36,888,706	59,985,908	49,700
Omagh	10,327,495	21,240,576	33,100
Strabane	2,275,116	8,558,477	25,400
Total	459,525,349	998,892,670	1,168,700

* Uncertified

Review of Public Administration

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what the total debt and financial liabilities of each local council will be following implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA), based on current figures; and what the total working age population will be in each local council area following RPA.

(AQW 26907/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The levels of debt and financial liabilities of each local council post 2015 will depend on key financial decisions that each council takes between now and 2015, including decisions on what costs will be required to complete the reform programme and how these costs will be met in each council cluster.

The Finance Working Group has been tasked with re-examining the costs and benefits of the local government reform programme, and the results are expected to be available in the next few weeks.

The population aged 16-64 as at mid-2012 for each new Local Government District is set out in the table below:

Local Government District	Mid-2012 population aged 16 to 64 years
Antrim & Newtownabbey	88,800
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	128,800

Local Government District	Mid-2012 population aged 16 to 64 years
Belfast	220,000
Causeway Coast & Glens	90,200
Derry & Strabane	96,200
Fermanagh & Omagh	72,600
Lisburn & Castlereagh	86,800
Mid & East Antrim	86,100
Mid Ulster	89,900
Newry, Mourne & Down	110,400
North Down & Ards	98,800
Northern Ireland	1,168,600

Winter Conditions

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment what preparations his Department has made for potentially difficult winter conditions.

(AQW 26913/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department continues to work with the Local Government Emergency Management Group to ensure that local government is operationally prepared to contribute to the Executive's response to adverse weather events.

The Local Government Emergency Management Group leads the council response to emergencies, working through a network of experienced officers. Where necessary, these officers coordinate a multi-agency response, initiate an emergency control room, and/or contact individual councils to provide staff and resources to support other agencies.

Additionally, the Department's Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance helps with council expenditure on emergency-related work and, in approved circumstances, provides for emergency payments of £1000 to households which have experienced severe inconvenience.

There is a strong and tested local government machinery to assist other key agencies in responding to winter, and other, emergencies.

DOE: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 26952/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is committed to promoting inclusion and provision for people with a disability and achieves this in a number of ways. In order to meet its commitments under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all new or revised policies are subject to equality screening to assess impacts on all nine equality categories set out under S75, including people with disabilities. The Department's Equality Scheme sets out how it intends to meet these commitments and contains an action plan setting out action measures it proposes to take during the period 2011-2016 to address key inequalities which have been identified relating to its functions, including a few aimed specifically at reducing inequalities for people with disabilities.

My Department also has in place a Disability Action Plan which contains an action plan setting out how we propose to meet the two disability duties under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. We have also recently published a five-year review of our Disability Action Plans which sets out the progress made in meeting these duties over the years since the introduction of our first Disability Action Plan on 1 July 2007.

My Department has also recently submitted its annual progress report to the Equality Commission which contains a number of good practice examples of how it has met the S75 duties during the 2012/13 year. The report contains a number of examples of how we have promoted inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

All of these documents are available on our internet site at: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/equality_unit.htm

European Directives: Breaches

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is an obligation on the UK member state, or his Department, to inform the European Commission when his Department breaches a European Directive.

(AQW 26974/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is an obligation on each Member State, and each emanation of the State, to take appropriate action to ensure compliance with EU legislation. EU legislation is transposed into national legislation which should set out the actions required and the sanctions and penalties which may be imposed should an actual or potential breach be identified. It is worth noting that some potential non-compliance issues are subject to interpretation of the legislation and can only really be confirmed by a European Court of Justice ruling. Some EU Directives and Regulations may require formal returns to the Commission in respect of progress against certain targets and objectives (for example Air Quality Directive or Waste Framework Directive targets) which may highlight potential breaches, however there is no specific obligation requiring the UK Member State or the Department to notify the European Commission of all potential or actual breaches by a Department, should they occur.

Seatbelts

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has invested in the new campaign encouraging people to wear their seatbelts.

(AQW 26988/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I launched the Department's new seatbelt campaign, entitled 'Once', on 10th October. The Department has invested £400,000 in developing the campaign. We anticipate that the campaign will run for approximately 10 years.

One of my Department's key responsibilities is to work towards further reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads each year. My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

My Department has estimated that some 2 lives, 22 serious injuries and 120 slight injuries would have been saved each year (2010-2012) if a 100% seatbelt wearing rate had been observed. Last year, 7 of those people who died on our roads and 36 of those seriously injured were not wearing a seatbelt. The Department for Transport estimates that each death on the roads costs £1.67M, each serious injury £187K and each slight injury over £14K.

A recent study by Oxford Economics isolates the importance of the role of DOE advertising and concludes that it has from 1995-2011 saved 21,977 men, women and children in Northern Ireland from death and serious injury on our roads. The study concludes that the economic payback of the advertising was £10 per £1 invested by DOE excluding human costs, and £42 per £1 invested including human costs.

The new seatbelt campaign will play a vital part in our ambition of working towards zero road deaths in Northern Ireland. It therefore fits within our shared ambition under my Department's 'Share the Road to Zero' campaign. This aspiration means that we do not accept that anyone should ever die on our roads; the new campaign will support this by encouraging people to adopt safer behaviours on the roads by always wearing a seatbelt. All road users can sign up to a pledge supporting this at www.sharetheroadtozero.com

The seatbelt campaign is part of a suite of campaigns which cover all major causes of collisions. The main causes of road casualties continue to be speeding, drink driving, inattention on our roads and failure to wear a seatbelt. Therefore, through the public information campaigns, the Department works towards encouraging all road users to be aware of their vulnerability, their responsibilities towards themselves and other road users, to influence their attitudes and behaviours when using, or thinking of using, the roads anywhere in Northern Ireland.

Emerging road safety issues and associated research will continue to be reviewed. For example, the Department is currently analysing available data and has commissioned qualitative research to help inform consideration of potential new educational activity around anti-speeding and cyclist safety.

I recognise the continuing challenges of reducing casualties on our roads, and will take forward further actions as appropriate from analysis and research.

Seatbelts

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been killed due to not wearing a seatbelt, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26989/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Available information is provided in Table 1 below. It is not possible to say from this data that the death was due to a seatbelt or suitable restraint not being worn.

Table 1 – The number of people killed in cars, light goods vehicles and taxis where it was known that a seatbelt was not worn.

Year	Fatalities (No Seatbelt)
2010	5
2011	3

Year	Fatalities (No Seatbelt)
2012	7

Source: PSNI Road Traffic Casualty Statistics.

Road Traffic Accidents Involving Bicycles

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been killed as a result of road traffic accidents involving bicycles, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26990/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Available information is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – The number of people killed in road traffic collisions where a pedal cycle was involved in the collision.

Year	Fatalities
2010	0
2011	2
2012	2

Source: PSNI Road Traffic Casualty Statistics.

Road Fatalities: Fatigue

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been killed as a result of road traffic accidents caused by fatigue or sleeplessness, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26991/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The precise number of cases cannot be released due to PSNI data disclosure policy being applied. Fatigue is a principal causation factor which can be recorded by an Investigating Officer at the time of a collision and is recorded for statistical purposes only. Due to there being 3 or fewer fatalities in any single year where this factor has been recorded, the actual number per year cannot be disclosed.

Taxi Operator's Licence

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether taxi drivers will have to complete a test before being granted a taxi operator licence.

(AQW 26996/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department recently consulted on proposals concerning a taxi driver test and periodic training for taxi drivers. These proposals relate to the arrangements for being granted a taxi driver's licence, and cover the necessary skills to drive a passenger-carrying vehicle safely. The consultation has now closed and my Department's proposed way forward will be provided to the Assembly's Environment Committee in the coming weeks.

The requirements for being issued with a Taxi Operator's Licence are set down in the Taxis (Northern Ireland) Act 2008 and The Taxi Operators Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. They concern whether the applicant is a fit and proper person to hold an operator's licence and require the provision of various information to the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

Taxi Regulations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the proposed new Taxi Regulations on the public hire sector of the industry.

(AQW 26997/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is responsible for implementing the Taxis Act (NI) 2008, which is the expressed will of the NI Assembly and is supported by the Environment Committee, consumer groups, disability groups and the majority of the taxi industry.

The constituent parts of the Taxi Reform Programme are:

- the introduction of Taxi Operator Licensing, which came into effect in September 2012;
- the introduction of single tier licensing;
- the requirement to have a taximeter & printer;
- the requirement to have specified roof sign; and
- reforming the arrangements for taxi driver testing and training.

The changes to the industry have been consulted on extensively and all interested parties have had the opportunity to engage and provide their comments. Each consultation has included draft impact assessments of the proposals for comment.

My Department has delayed the implementation timetable on more than one occasion, recognising the change that is needed for all in the taxi industry and the time it may take to address these changes. It is my view that sufficient time has been given for operators to adapt to the reforms, a view that members of the Environment Committee have also expressed.

Whilst there are extra costs involved in the implementation of the reform programme (between £640 and £740), I do not believe that the reforms will have a detrimental effect on overall consumer demand for taxis. Rather, I expect the implementation of the Taxi Reform Programme, and associated enforcement activities, to drive the evident demand for illegal taxis into the compliant sector, meaning that all taxi operators can take advantage from this increased demand for the services for legal taxis. I am currently considering if the costs can be phased, alongside the implementation of the remaining elements of the reform programme in September 2014.

Specifically in relation to Belfast Public Hire, my view is that the demand for their services within the wider taxi market will be determined by the service they provide and the price at which they provide it. Consumers will, and should, be able to exercise choice and this is a matter for each consumer. It is for my Department, as regulator, to set floor standards which all operators, vehicles and drivers must meet – so that taxi users can receive the service they expect – and then ensure compliance with those standards.

I do not believe that sectors of the industry should be segregated, particularly when consumer groups and public consultation has spoken strongly in favour of change. I acknowledge, however, my Department's role in supporting the industry through the changes being implemented. To this end, officials have engaged extensively with Belfast Public Hire representatives in recent months and have expended considerable efforts and energies in supporting them to arrange meetings with other parts of government.

Taxi Regulations: Disability

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what provision is being made for passengers with a disability in the proposed new taxi regulations.

(AQW 26999/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As part of the development of the proposed new taxi Regulations, my Department has carried out an extensive engagement process with representatives of consumers with mobility impairment, and a key strand of the process has focussed on ensuring an adequate supply of wheelchair accessible taxis across Northern Ireland. To this end, an independent review has been commissioned to assess the level of supply of such taxis and to recommend a technical specification for what will form the basis of a new class of wheelchair accessible taxis (Class B taxi).

The new recommended specification includes dimensions for door apertures, ramps, grab handles and steps, as well as anchors and fastening for wheelchairs. Full details will be published when a formal consultation issues later this year.

Once the new regulations are implemented, only Class B taxis will be permitted to stand at taxi ranks in Belfast. Consideration will be given to whether it is appropriate to roll this out to other areas of Northern Ireland, or if the disabled community is better served by promoting a more mixed fleet throughout Northern Ireland.

In addition, my Department recently consulted on proposals concerning a taxi driver test and periodic training for taxi drivers, the latter element of which may include an element of periodic training for drivers. These proposals relate to the arrangements for being granted a taxi driver's licence, and cover the necessary skills to drive a passenger-carrying vehicle safely. The consultation has now closed and my Department's proposed way forward will be provided to the Assembly's Environment Committee in the coming weeks. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, the prescribed training package may include elements around interaction with customers with reduced mobility, which in time may lead to an increased awareness throughout the taxi industry of the needs of people with impaired mobility issues.

My Department will continue to monitor and review the levels of provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles across Northern Ireland, to ensure that the new provisions do not have unforeseen impacts on availability.

Taxi Enforcement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff in his Department work in taxi enforcement; and, on average, how many of these staff work each evening.

(AQW 27047/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver & Vehicle Agency currently has two dedicated PSV teams responsible for both taxi and bus enforcement. One team is based in Belfast and the other in Newbuildings and they have a combined staffing complement of 20 enforcement officers.

On average DVA has between 2 to 3 enforcement officers on duty each evening. Please note this is not part of official statistics and has not been subject to data validation.

Environment Agency: Board

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure there is a suitable replacement for the independent member of the Board of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

(AQW 27058/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have no plans to replace the present independent member of the NIEA Board when his term of appointment comes to an end.

Driving Offences

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment whether there are any plans to introduce tougher penalties and fines for serious driving offences.

(AQW 27101/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department co-ordinates a strategic approach to road safety, primarily through the delivery of the Road Safety Strategy to 2020. The Strategy contains over 200 action measures aimed at reducing further all deaths and serious injuries on our roads - ultimately I want to challenge everyone to work together towards zero road deaths by taking personal responsibility for how they behave on our roads.

Given that most casualties are caused by poor driver behaviour I believe that improving and enforcing best driving practice must be our first priority. Over the coming months, I plan to introduce a Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill into the Assembly to toughen our drink driving regime, reform the way learner and novice drivers are trained, tested and licensed and require the wearing of crash helmets when driving a quad bike on the public road.

These measures will bring about a number of new offences and penalties which I believe will be perceived as fair and proportionate in effectively tackling the harm caused by some of the most serious driving offences.

The problems caused by drink drivers are well known and there is an increasing awareness of the dangers of driving while unfit through drugs. Drug driving is a complex issue with a wide variety of drugs possibly being consumed, including prescription and illicit drugs, and with varying intoxicating and impairing effects. Legislation is currently in place here that prohibits driving while impaired through drink or drugs; however, police currently have to demonstrate impairment before a driver can be prosecuted. As you might be aware, powers were taken in Westminster before the summer to make drug driving a specific offence, without the need to prove impairment. The drugs to be included and the levels at which offences will be committed are to be set in future regulations. I am, therefore, considering how we can bring drug driving into line with drink driving to enable more effective law enforcement.

While I support a zero tolerance approach to driving with illicit drugs, this is a complex issue. We are liaising closely with Britain and Ireland to allow us to consider carefully the direction we wish to take and policy and legislative direction will be worked out over the next few years.

As well as concentrating on areas where new legislation is required it is also important to review existing offences and penalties.

Those which apply to the most serious offences have been subject to change in recent years. The maximum penalty for causing death or grievous bodily injury by driving dangerously was increased from 10 to 14 years in 2004; and in 2008 we were the first part of these islands to introduce an offence of causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless driving, which carries a maximum sentence of 5 years. You will be also be interested to note that my Department plans to carry out a review of all current penalties for road traffic offences, including penalty points, which will begin in 2015. This review is a medium term action measure in the Road Safety Strategy. It will also assess the scope for conditions and circumstances around the commission of an offence to be reflected in the applicable penalties.

It is worth pointing out that individual sentencing decisions are a matter for the courts based on the evidence and established facts in each individual case. It is important, however, that the maximum penalty whether imprisonment, fine, disqualification or penalty points is at a level that adequately reflects the gravity of the offence and provides the courts with viable sentencing options.

I hope you are reassured by the plans that are in place to introduce new legislation to address key road safety issues. When in place these measures will deliver a range of new offences and penalties which I believe will act as a deterrent, reflect the gravity of the offence and attract public confidence. I also think they will send out a very clear message to irresponsible drivers that they can no longer afford to ignore the law and put lives at risk.

Otters

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the distribution of the otter population; and (ii) the measures her Department has in place to protect the otter.

(AQW 27122/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The otter is widely distributed in Northern Ireland. The most recent survey took place in 2010, with otters successfully detected at 334 of the 377 sites examined. This is a percentage occurrence of 88.6%, representing a significant overall increase of 26.9% since the last survey in 2001/02.

The otter is listed on Annex II and Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive. The Annex II listing requires Member States to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for the protection of the species. There are 6 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) declared for the species in Northern Ireland. In addition, as a European Protected Species, otters are protected under The Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) (also known as the Habitat Regulations), which transposes the Habitats Directive. They are also listed on schedule 6 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 which prohibits them from being killed or taken by certain methods. It is therefore an offence to deliberately capture, injure or kill an otter. It is also an offence to deliberately disturb an otter in any way, or to disturb, damage, or destroy

an otter's breeding site or resting place unless a licence has been obtained. The species is also covered by a UK Biodiversity Action Plan and a Northern Ireland Species Action Plan.

Taxis: Private Hire

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many private hire taxi drivers have been detected as being in breach of regulation by taking non-booked passengers, in each of the last five years, broken down by council area; and to detail the penalty imposed in each case.

(AQW 27141/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information requested cannot be provided as records are not held in this format. Illegal activity of this nature is primarily a breach of condition of a PSV licence which can be dealt with by way of 'Advice and Warn', Fixed Penalty Notice or Prosecution. Records are only available in respect of those offences detected within the city limits of Belfast that resulted in the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice, which were introduced in February 2011.

During the period 1st March 2011 to 30th June 2013 there were 25 private hire taxi drivers issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice for picking up non-booked passengers within the city limits of Belfast. Please note this is not part of official statistics and has not been subject to data validation.

Local Government Reform: Council Headquarters

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how many current council headquarters will be left redundant following the amalgamation of councils.

(AQO 4784/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As part of local government reform, the rationalisation of the current configuration of 26 councils to create 11 new councils will result in a number of issues that local government will need to address in terms of its estate. The draft Local Government Bill, which passed its second stage in the Assembly on 1 October 2013, makes provision for the transfer of ownership of all assets and liabilities, including buildings, from the current councils to the new ones on 1 April 2015.

Any decision regarding the future use of current council headquarters will be a matter for the new councils to determine. In reaching decisions, councils will need to ensure that the best use is made of their existing estate. This will be influenced by both the geographical spread of the new council areas and the need to ensure that the both the quality of services and their accessibility to ratepayers are not unduly impacted.

This will be one of the many issues that will need to be addressed by the new councils during the period in which they will operate in shadow mode from May 2014 to March 2015. Meanwhile, Statutory Transition Committees should be commissioning work to ensure that each council's asset register is up to date and accurate and that all other information is available early in the shadow period to allow decisions to be made swiftly on the best use of the combined estate of the new council area.

North Coast

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place to maintain and protect the natural environment of the North Coast.

(AQO 4785/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are numerous measures in place to maintain and protect the natural environment of the North Coast.

The distinctive and special landscapes of the North Coast have been designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty including Binevenagh and the Causeway Coast, whilst the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast has also been inscribed as a World Heritage Site.

Areas that have been identified by scientific survey as being of high conservation value have been designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Areas of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserves, including: Magilligan SAC/Nature Reserve; Bann Estuary SAC; North Antrim Coast SAC; Rathlin Island SAC/SPA; Sheep Island SPA and the marine Skerries and Causeway Coast candidate SAC.

These sites are provided with a degree of protection and management requirements by associated statutory provisions, as are many species, including nesting birds and marine species such as basking sharks, and grey and common seals. Designated sites and species are also provided with a degree of protection via our Planning system in the form of policies within Planning Policy Statements and Development Plans.

There are a wide range of proactive management measures which are undertaken to help maintain designated and protected natural assets and also natural assets that are found in the wider countryside and coastal areas.

These include the development and initiation of action plans, management plans or management agreements by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, partner bodies and landowners to maintain natural assets or to restore them to a more favourable status. For example, my predecessor, Alex Attwood, launched the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme during June of this year.

In some instances NIEA can provide financial assistance, such as via the Natural Heritage Grant Programme, to enable partners to develop such plans or to help deliver the actions and recommendations within them.

All of these measures and actions combine and complement each other to maintain and protect the natural environment of the North Coast.

Wind Farms: North/South Planning

Mr Milne asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will work within the North South Ministerial Council to develop a single island approach on the part of planning authorities in respect of windfarm applications.

(AQO 4786/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I believe that co-operation on strategic environmental and planning matters is an issue of great importance that can provide mutual benefit to all parts of this Island. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland share similar strategic development issues, opportunities and challenges and it makes sense to work together on these matters.

High level cooperation already exists between both jurisdictions in relation to strategic planning for infrastructure. In addition, there are transboundary consultation arrangements in relation to planning applications and plans being considered under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations.

Present arrangements do not provide opportunity to discuss this particular area in the NSMC meetings. However, my planning officials already communicate, co-operate and share practices on a regular basis with officials from the south on such issues and I will ensure that they continue to do so.

Dual Mandate

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has held any discussions with Her Majesty's Government on the provision of legislation at Westminster to ensure an end to dual mandates before the proposed local government elections on 22nd May 2014.

(AQO 4787/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The legislation at Westminster, the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill seeks to prevent a member of this House from holding office simultaneously as an MLA and a member of the House of Commons or the Dáil Éireann.

The Local Government Bill, which was introduced into the Assembly on 23 September 2013 and is currently at Committee stage, contains provisions to prevent an MP, MLA or MEP from being a councillor. This is quite separate from the provision on dual mandate being taken forward at Westminster.

There have been no discussions with the Secretary of State on this issue.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact on the environment of the non-conventional extraction of oil and gas by hydraulic fracturing.

(AQO 4788/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The hydraulic fracturing (Fracking) process has generated much debate in Northern Ireland and around the world because of the potential detrimental impact on the environment, particularly in relation to water quality, air emission issues, seismic impacts, as well as general personal health concerns raised by local communities.

In an attempt to allay these concerns specific divisions within my Department, primarily Planning NI and NIEA, are actively working to enhance their knowledge of the Fracking process by assessing emerging research which includes case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with colleagues in other Environment Agencies in Britain and Ireland, and other countries where Fracking is currently proposed or taking place.

Specifically:

- My Department represents Northern Ireland at the European level on the EU Technical Working Group on Unconventional Fossil Fuels;
- At UK level my Department represents Northern Ireland on the Unconventional Gas Regulators Group which includes relevant regulators from throughout the UK;
- On a cross border level my Departmental officials meet regularly with the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency and are co-funding and co-leading a major research programme. Consultation on the proposed Terms of Reference has now concluded attracting a significant response from across the industry and interested parties.
- My Department also participates on a NI Shale Gas Regulators Forum consisting of representatives from government departments and agencies with a potential regulatory role in relation to fracking activities. This forum, formally established following a meeting between the DETI Minister, Arlene Foster MLA and the former DOE Minister, Alex Atwood MLA, will drive cross cutting issues, such as the impact of potential seismic activity on well integrity, to be discussed and assessed by the relevant regulators i.e. Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, NIEA and the Health and Safety Executive.
- I wish to make it clear that the purpose of the Forum is to consider the multiple issues around Fracking and does not in any way either indicate my support or my Department's support for the process or compromise the authority of its agencies when it comes to planning, habitats and the relevant assessments.

The former Minister and a Senior DoE Official also visited the United States in 2012, where they received presentations and briefings from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Research and Development, and Office of Air and Radiation on the issue of hydraulic fracturing.

These presentations and briefings highlighted the work that the US EPA is doing, and its planned work in relation to the environmental impact of Fracking. In particular briefing was received on the US EPA's ongoing research programme on the potential impact of shale gas extraction on drinking water supplies, and also their work on potential technological and regulatory controls on gas emissions.

As studies, reports and assessments are completed, a broader evidence base will emerge which will aid decision making on the issue. Decisions on granting permissions will only be made when the full scientific and research picture is complete. I recognise that to do otherwise given the scale of ongoing research, would not reflect good governance.

Cyclists: Road Safety

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to help promote the road safety of cyclists, including those participating in the Cycle to Work initiative.

(AQO 4789/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Drivers are responsible for the majority of collisions on our roads. The main causes of the collisions are speeding, drink driving and inattention. Changing the attitudes and behaviours of drivers is therefore the most effective way of protecting all road users and the Department's campaigns concentrate on changing such behaviours. The Road Safety Strategy recognises cyclists as a vulnerable road user group and includes a range of actions that relate to cyclists' safety.

Since the publication of the Road Safety Strategy in April 2011 the Department has launched a number of road safety campaigns.

In October 2011, the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign was launched to remind drivers and cyclists to pay attention when sharing the road.

In May 2012, a campaign was launched to encourage road users to 'respect everyone's journey'. The important safety messages to drivers will benefit all vulnerable road user groups, including cyclists.

In September 2012, a campaign was launched, focusing on wider road user responsibility, urging all road users to take responsibility for their actions on the road. The television, press and online campaign includes an injured cyclist saying "I was cycling in the bike lane. The driver said the sun was in his eyes."

A further campaign, launched on 24 April 2013, invites everyone to 'Share the Road to Zero'. This is aimed at all road user groups – cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists, drivers and passengers and, indeed, focuses heavily on cyclists in the opening scenes. The aim is to get every road user to take personal responsibility for helping to prevent deaths on Northern Ireland's roads. The social media aspect of this campaign invites the whole community to do what they can to work towards zero deaths on our roads; it also provides appropriately targeted road safety messages to subscribers. This can be found at www.sharetheroadtozero.com

A 'Cycling Skills & Cycling Safety' guide, developed by DOE and DRD, is available in hard copy and online and provides information on basic safety requirements and on the rules of the road.

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme is offered by the DOE Road Safety Education Officer Service to every primary school in Northern Ireland. Over 530 primary schools participate in the scheme each year, with approximately 8,365 children benefiting from the scheme annually.

The Highway Code gives advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, with extra care and also provides advice specifically for cyclists in Rules 59 to 82.

The Cycle to Work Scheme was introduced in the NICS in June 2012 and enables staff to hire a bicycle for use in the journey to and from work. The scheme was established to encourage staff to use bicycles as their preferred means of transport to and from work.

The scheme covers not only the purchase of the cycle but also safety equipment such as compliant cycle helmet, lights, reflective and protective clothing, pump, repair kit, mirror, mudguards and cycle shoes. To date 192 staff in DOE have availed of the Scheme.

The campaigns and initiatives launched by the Department in recent years will contribute to a change in the road safety behaviours and attitudes of all road users and make the road safer for everyone including those cyclists who have availed of the Cycle to Work initiative.

Between 2008 and 2012, six cyclists died on our roads. So far this year three cyclists have died. Given a rise in cyclist casualties, the Department is currently analysing available data and has commissioned qualitative research to help inform consideration of potential new educational activity around cyclist safety. I recognise the continuing challenges of reducing all casualties on our roads, including cyclists and will take forward further actions as appropriate.

Carrier Bag Levy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment whether groups will be able to apply for funding for environmental projects from the single use bag levy.

(AQO 4790/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Yes. I am keen that a wide variety of groups across Northern Ireland have access to the carrier bag levy funds. I will be announcing in the next few weeks how community and other groups can apply for funding for environmental projects.

Details of the application process and the amount of funding available for environmental projects will form part of the announcement.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQO 4791/11-15)

Mr Durkan: After extensive assessment of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission, my Department recently submitted BMAP to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) for assessment of the Plan against the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). I expect DRD's consideration to be completed by 16 October and subject to the Plan being awarded a Certificate of General Conformity, preparations for publication will commence and are expected to take 3 – 4 months. Once completed, I plan to adopt BMAP at the earliest opportunity.

Review of Public Administration: Cost

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of the Environment for the updated figures on the cost of the implementation of local government reform.

(AQO 4792/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of local government service delivery, carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years.

The Regional Transition Committee has commissioned the Finance Working Group with the key task of developing an up to date and accurate analysis of the full costs and benefits of the reform implementation programme. Local government has been leading this work, and a response is expected within the coming weeks.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Jobs

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment what issues he intends to raise with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport when he meets him in London in November.

(AQO 4793/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The purpose of my meeting with Stephen Hammond, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, on 6 November is to follow-up on a comprehensive response I made to him on the public consultation carried out by DVLA on the future of vehicle licensing in Northern Ireland.

As you know, since I came to office, I have continued my predecessor's robust opposition to the threatened centralisation of vehicle licensing services in Swansea and the closure of all motor tax offices here, which would result in the loss of over 300 jobs and the withdrawal of local services for motorists.

I will be again emphasising to Mr Hammond the wider social, economic and political context of the decision facing him about the delivery of vehicle licensing. I will point out the disproportionate impact that the loss of over 300 jobs would have on the Northern Ireland economy, particularly on Coleraine but also on the other seven locations that have local offices.

I will remind Mr Hammond of the exceptionally high and independently validated standards of service and quality of performance achieved by DVA and I will point out the unanimous, cross-party support in the Assembly against the centralisation proposal and assure him that this reflects the depth and range of opposition right across the community. I will explain to him that many customers in Northern Ireland clearly want to have the choice of dealing with DVA staff in relation to vehicle licensing and that it is unrealistic, especially given lower rates of uptake of online services here, to expect customers to be able to switch instantly to new delivery channels or to accept the remote delivery of services from Swansea.

I will also challenge Mr Hammond to justify any cuts to jobs in Northern Ireland in the context of his Government's commitments to the Northern Ireland Executive to help in the stimulation and development of the economy here as we seek to move out of a recession that has been more acute and sustained than in other parts of the UK.

Finally, I will point out to Mr Hammond the alternatives to cutting local jobs and services. I will demonstrate how the very able and committed staff in DVA could, with up-to-date technology that they have been denied through under investment by DVLA, continue to deliver high quality services to local customers and to customers across the UK.

Wind Turbines: Binevenagh

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the concerns raised by the local community and gliding club over the construction of wind turbines in the Binevenagh area of County Londonderry.

(AQW 27261/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is currently dealing with an application for a wind farm within Binevenagh AONB (C/2013/0248/F). The Environmental Statement to accompany the application has just recently been received and therefore formal processing of the application has just begun. The application will be determined under Planning Policy 18 – Renewable Energy and associated supplementary planning guidance ‘Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland’s Landscapes’. All representations made to the Department will be fully considered in the determination of the application, including those from any local organisations such as the gliding club.

Wind Turbines: Binevenagh

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment whether any planning applications for the erection of wind turbines in the Binevenagh area of Co. Londonderry have been approved.

(AQW 27303/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department refused 2 wind farm applications within the Binevenagh AONB primarily on the grounds of an unacceptable adverse impact on the visual amenity and landscape character of the AONB designation.

The decision on these 2 wind farms totalling 21 turbines at 125m in height were overturned by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC). The PAC in approving these 2 wind farms considered the economic benefits to be derived to be sufficiently significant to override the landscape concerns.

Due to technical constraints I am unable to provide you with the detail on the number of single wind turbines that have received planning permission within the AONB. I will forward you this information as soon as it has been extracted from our database.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Special Advisers: Termination of Appointment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act 2013, has the appointment of any Special Advisers been terminated and, if so, when.

(AQW 25898/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The impact of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 on the appointment of any Special Advisers is a matter for each employing department. With regard to the Department of Finance and Personnel, no appointment of a Special Adviser has been terminated.

Project Bank Accounts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to departmental projects, to estimate how many project bank accounts will be introduced in both this and the next financial year, to detail the location and value of these contracts.

(AQW 26196/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Departments estimate that Project Bank Accounts will be included in twenty projects in this and the next financial year as listed in Table 1 at Annex A. The figures provided are subject to the explanatory notes below the table.

Table 1 Annex A

Department of/for	Project Name	Project Location	Project Value	Year
Finance & Personnel	Adelaide House Refurbishment	Belfast	>£1m	14/15
	Castle Court Refurbishment	Belfast	>£1m	14/15
Regional Development	Magherafelt Bypass	Magherafelt	£25m	14/15

Department of/for	Project Name	Project Location	Project Value	Year
Social Development	Oldpark Road, PREI Scheme	Belfast	£3.50m	14/15
	Shankill Gateway PREI Scheme	Belfast	£3.25m	14/15
	Albert Bridge / Templemore Junction PREI Scheme	Belfast	£2.90m	14/15
	The Bullring, Greater Shankill	Belfast	£1.60m	14/15
	Central Station PREI Scheme	Belfast	£1.02m	14/15
	Albert Street PREI Scheme	Belfast	£1.00m	14/15
	Lagan Footbridge	Belfast	£3.30m	14/15
	Fort George Consultancy Services for remediation	Londonderry	£2.50m	13/14
Health, Social Services & Public Safety	Belfast City Hospital Mental Health Inpatient Unit	Belfast	£32.2m	14/15
	Royal Victoria Maternity Hospital	Belfast	£46.2m	14/15
	Altnagelvin Phase 5.1 - Treatment Wing refurbishment	Londonderry	£73.5m	14/15
	RVH Energy Centre	Belfast	£19m	14/15
	Regional Children's Hospital	Belfast	£219m	14/15
	Craigavon Area Hospital Mechanical Infrastructure Upgrade	Craigavon	£6.50m	13/14
Justice	New Prison Accommodation Block	Maghaberry	£32m	14/15
Agriculture & Rural Development	Rivers Agency Regional Office	Omagh	£1.12m	13/14
the Environment	Roller shutter doors in DVA Testing centres	Across NI	£1.01m	14/15
Culture, Arts & Leisure	None	—	—	—
Employment & Learning	None	—	—	—
Education	None	—	—	—
Enterprise, Trade and Investment	None	—	—	—
Office of the First and Deputy First Minister	None	—	—	—
Public Prosecution Service	None	—	—	—

Explanatory notes.

- 1 Central Procurement Directorate, when letting construction works contracts on behalf of DFP or other departments, will incorporate use of a Project Bank Account in appropriate contracts with a value in excess of £1million and which contain a significant subcontract element.
- 2 The figures provided are each department's estimate of the projects which will incorporate Project Bank Accounts.

Graduates: Average Salary

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average salary of graduates.
(AQW 26678/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not hold information on the average salary of graduates.

NI Advisory Committee

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the membership and the dates of meetings for the NI Advisory Committee that advise the National Asset Management Agency Board.

(AQW 26882/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NAMA Northern Ireland Advisory Committee is a sub-committee of the NAMA Board. I cannot therefore account for its membership or report details of its meetings.

NI Advisory Committee

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work of the NI Advisory Committee to the National Asset Management Agency board.

(AQW 26883/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NAMA Northern Ireland Advisory Committee is a sub-committee of the NAMA Board. I cannot therefore account for its membership or report details of its meetings.

A26

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he expects to inform the Minister of Regional Development on the availability of funding for the A26 upgrade.

(AQW 26888/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In my statement to the Assembly on Monday 21st October 2013, I announced allocations agreed by the Executive following the October 2013 In-Year Monitoring Round and the 2014-15 Capital Reallocation Exercise. This included an allocation of £8.1 million in 2014-15 for the A26 Glarryford to Drones Road Dual Carriageway.

NI Water: Scheme of Charges 2013/14

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to detail; (i) the amount domestic water charges as detailed in Northern Ireland Water's Scheme of Charges 2013/14, would have raised in the current financial year had they been levied in full on domestic consumers; (ii) the basis on which the charging structure was formulated; and (iii) if he would expect the domestic element in the Regional Rate to be reduced if water charges were imposed, and if so, by how much.

(AQW 26977/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: During 2013/14 the Department for Regional Development will pay £275m to Northern Ireland Water in lieu of customer charges.

The Executive has decided to defer the introduction of separate domestic water charges during this Programme for Government period. There are no plans to impose specific water charges on households and therefore I cannot comment on Regional Rate reductions.

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his Department's performance against the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women.

(AQW 26983/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: On 17 July 2013, the United Nations Committee that oversees the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) formally examined the UK's performance in terms of its CEDAW obligations. Northern Ireland Departments took part in this Examination and my Department provided relevant information as part of the associated briefing material.

Fiscal Powers and Enterprise Zones

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the on-going work regarding (i) devolving additional fiscal powers; and (ii) designating Enterprise Zones

(AQW 26985/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The devolution of responsibility for corporation tax remains a key objective for the Executive. Work on the design of a devolved corporation tax regime is continuing to ensure that if a decision to proceed with devolution is forthcoming, the Government can meet the aim of making necessary legislative changes prior to the prorogation of the current Parliament.

Furthermore, and in line with the commitment in the Building a Prosperous and United Community document, we are also examining the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers. As a first stage of this work, DFP is currently undertaking a scoping exercise to examine the Calman and Silk Commission reports, the positions taken in respect of each individual tax and the wider financial context in that regard. Following this a work programme will be developed to progress

this exercise with the aim of putting recommendations for further devolution to Executive and Government Ministers by autumn 2014.

With regards to Enterprise Zones, we are also considering the merits of establishing zones that would have the ability to offer Enhanced Capital Allowances in Northern Ireland.

Economic Advisory Group: Access to Finance Report

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline how he is working with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to implement the recommendations within the Economic Advisory Group Report on access to finance.

(AQW 27006/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Economic Advisory Group (EAG) report contained a number of recommendations for Government, the banks and businesses. Both the Enterprise Minister and I have taken the necessary steps to implement those actions for which we are responsible and to put arrangements in place to encourage and oversee the delivery of those actions that fall to others.

Exports

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the countries that local business export to, broken down by percentage.

(AQW 27014/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Trade in Goods information is available from the Regional Trade Statistics (RTS), which are produced by HMRC. The RTS are published quarterly and show trade at summary product and country group level, split by UK regions and devolved administrations. Table 1 attached shows the value and percentage of exports from Northern Ireland split by Country for calendar year 2012.

In addition, latest results (2011) from the Exporting Northern Ireland Services Study (ENIS) show that trade in services from the manufacturing, construction and other high export potential groups was estimated at £495 million. Broad destination data is available for the high export potential group only and is provided in Table 2 (attached).

Table 1. Value of exports from Northern Ireland to all countries (2012)

Country	Exports / £ 000's	% of Total Exports
Irish Republic	2,064,375	36.1
United States	520,475	9.1
Canada	345,472	6.0
France	275,321	4.8
Germany	226,918	4.0
Australia	146,008	2.6
Netherlands	136,140	2.4
Other Asia and Oceania	128,301	2.2
Saudi Arabia	111,703	2.0
Thailand	105,092	1.8
Belgium	100,355	1.8
Uae	83,561	1.5
China	80,377	1.4
Spain	75,185	1.3
Russia	63,196	1.1
Italy	59,866	1.0
South Africa	56,096	1.0
Nigeria	51,346	0.9
Other Sub-Saharan Africa	47,410	0.8
Singapore	46,706	0.8
Poland	45,875	0.8

Country	Exports / £ 000's	% of Total Exports
Portugal	43,623	0.8
Hong Kong	41,746	0.7
Switzerland	39,521	0.7
Denmark	37,909	0.7
Kuwait	37,835	0.7
Turkey	35,336	0.6
Sweden	35,177	0.6
Mexico	35,065	0.6
Brazil	28,965	0.5
Japan	27,919	0.5
India	27,434	0.5
Israel	25,065	0.4
Other Middle East and North Africa	25,003	0.4
Finland	24,451	0.4
Ivory Coast	24,217	0.4
Norway	23,489	0.4
Czech Republic	21,409	0.4
Oman	21,365	0.4
Pakistan	21,315	0.4
Chile	20,937	0.4
Kenya	20,929	0.4
Angola	20,714	0.4
Ukraine	17,909	0.3
Austria	17,722	0.3
Qatar	16,831	0.3
Colombia	16,634	0.3
Lebanon	14,642	0.3
Other Latin America and the Caribbean	13,471	0.2
South Korea	11,683	0.2
Other Eastern Europe	11,477	0.2
Hungary	11,440	0.2
Egypt	11,061	0.2
New Zealand	10,763	0.2
Taiwan	10,647	0.2
Lithuania	9,599	0.2
Greece	9,521	0.2
Ghana	9,502	0.2
Venezuela	9,331	0.2
Romania	8,954	0.2
Bahrain	6,974	0.1
Algeria	6,913	0.1

Country	Exports / £ 000's	% of Total Exports
Philippines	6,233	0.1
Jordan	6,229	0.1
Argentina	5,708	0.1
Latvia	5,654	0.1
Morocco	5,524	0.1
Cyprus	5,139	0.1
Bulgaria	4,203	0.1
Tunisia	4,074	0.1
Malta	3,797	0.1
Ecuador	3,606	0.1
Indonesia	3,538	0.1
Libya	2,970	0.1
Ethiopia	2,627	0.0
Slovakia	2,444	0.0
Tanzania	2,420	0.0
Croatia	2,376	0.0
Mauritius	2,279	0.0
Iceland	2,263	0.0
Estonia	2,252	0.0
Slovenia	2,199	0.0
Panama	2,036	0.0
Costa Rica	1,970	0.0
Dominican Rep	1,777	0.0
Cameroon	1,756	0.0
Jamaica	1,186	0.0
Trinidad:Tobago	1,085	0.0
Zimbabwe	991	0.0
Uruguay	947	0.0
Guyana	847	0.0
Syria	676	0.0
Other Western Europe	606	0.0
Luxembourg	598	0.0
Iran	589	0.0
Barbados	151	0.0
Namibia	80	0.0
Botswana	37	0.0
All Exports	5,725,143	100.0

Source: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC

Table 2. Trade in Service Exports by High Potential Companies (HEP) by Broad Destination (2011)

Destination	Exports (£m)	% of Total HEP Exports
Ireland	75.7	30.7%
Rest of Europe	19.8	8.0%
Rest of World	151.4	61.3%
Total¹	247.0	100%

1 Manufacturing and Construction Service Exports account for an additional £248 million; however this figure cannot be disaggregated by destination.

Imports

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the countries that local business import from, broken down by percentage.

(AQW 27015/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Imports data is available from the Regional Trade Statistics (RTS), which are produced by HMRC. The RTS are published quarterly and show trade at summary product and country group level, split by UK regions and devolved administrations.

Table 1 attached shows the value and percentage of imports, split by Country for 2012.

Table 1. Value of imports to Northern Ireland from all countries (2012)

Country	Imports / £ 000's	% of Total Imports
Irish Republic	1,545,043	27.1
China	938,412	16.4
United States	436,209	7.6
Germany	318,704	5.6
Netherlands	309,971	5.4
France	249,517	4.4
Other Asia and Oceania	220,598	3.9
Italy	219,932	3.9
Spain	159,740	2.8
Turkey	157,898	2.8
India	151,820	2.7
Belgium	110,264	1.9
Sweden	90,368	1.6
Poland	67,134	1.2
Canada	61,964	1.1
Argentina	60,712	1.1
Pakistan	44,876	0.8
Indonesia	43,410	0.8
Japan	42,721	0.7
Taiwan	39,117	0.7
Hong Kong	36,553	0.6
Brazil	34,507	0.6
Switzerland	32,001	0.6
Denmark	31,383	0.5
Colombia	30,244	0.5

Country	Imports / £ 000's	% of Total Imports
Thailand	24,482	0.4
Russia	22,984	0.4
Uae	21,676	0.4
Austria	18,148	0.3
Ukraine	15,165	0.3
Czech Republic	13,887	0.2
Portugal	13,378	0.2
Finland	13,285	0.2
South Africa	11,117	0.2
South Korea	8,415	0.1
Chile	8,397	0.1
New Zealand	8,179	0.1
Luxembourg	7,271	0.1
Iran	7,049	0.1
Israel	7,014	0.1
Australia	6,915	0.1
Estonia	6,221	0.1
Norway	6,041	0.1
Lithuania	5,940	0.1
Mexico	4,864	0.1
Latvia	4,689	0.1
Singapore	4,112	0.1
Kenya	3,527	0.1
Slovakia	3,398	0.1
Hungary	3,203	0.1
Philippines	3,174	0.1
Romania	2,992	0.1
Morocco	2,792	0.0
Algeria	2,007	0.0
Oman	1,894	0.0
Egypt	1,759	0.0
Other Latin America and the Caribbean	1,414	0.0
Malta	1,383	0.0
Other Eastern Europe	1,328	0.0
Greece	1,324	0.0
Slovenia	1,087	0.0
Bulgaria	1,036	0.0
Ghana	963	0.0
Cyprus	839	0.0
Saudi Arabia	650	0.0
Uruguay	569	0.0

Country	Imports / £ 000's	% of Total Imports
Cameroon	302	0.0
Other Sub-Saharan Africa	218	0.0
Jordan	209	0.0
Croatia	180	0.0
Ivory Coast	168	0.0
Lebanon	114	0.0
Tanzania	102	0.0
Iceland	99	0.0
Trinidad:Tobago	91	0.0
Tunisia	76	0.0
Ecuador	47	0.0
Bahrain	47	0.0
Other Middle East and North Africa	47	0.0
Panama	46	0.0
Kuwait	26	0.0
Jamaica	17	0.0
Mauritius	13	0.0
Qatar	11	0.0
Costa Rica	9	0.0
Dominican Rep	5	0.0
Namibia	5	0.0
Other Western Europe	5	0.0
Angola	1	0.0
All Imports	5,709,504	100.0

Source: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC

Full Employment

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of how full employment would effect (i) Gross Value Added; and (ii) the fiscal deficit.

(AQW 27089/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My department has not carried out any assessment of how full employment would affect gross value added or the fiscal deficit. Clearly though, full employment if that were achievable would most likely result in greater output, an increase in direct tax revenue and less expenditure on areas such as social security, thereby having a positive impact on the fiscal deficit.

Public Prosecution Service: Funding

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the measures in place to monitor the use of moneys allocated to the Public Prosecution Service.

(AQW 27091/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) is a non-ministerial department. Like all departments it is subject to the formal processes in place to monitor the use of moneys allocated to it. Funding for the department is provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly and, as Accounting Officer for the Service, the Director of Public Prosecutions is responsible for ensuring that the public monies provided are used effectively and efficiently

The fundamental principle in respect of the public expenditure control framework is that Northern Ireland departments must not incur expenditure in excess of the amounts approved by the Executive.

As departmental priorities change, the in-year monitoring process provides a formal system for reviewing spending plans and priorities for each financial year in light of the most up to date information. This process therefore aides good financial management and ensures that resources are directed towards the highest priority areas.

The Department of Finance and Personnel is responsible for co-ordinating the monitoring process and providing advice to the Minister of Finance and Personnel on the proposal for each round. The Finance Minister then brings his proposals to the Executive for approval.

Anti-fraud Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department has an anti-fraud unit; and if so, to detail its (i) annual budget; (ii) staff complement; and (iii) successes to date.

(AQW 27178/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not have an anti-fraud unit.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

European Working Time Directive: Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 26086/11-15, how many consultants have opted out of the European Working Time Directive; and whether he has any plans to introduce mechanisms to record external hours worked by consultants contracted to do Health and Social Care work.

(AQW 26748/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): One HSC Trust (Southern) advised that twelve consultants had opted out of the European Working Time Directive. The other four HSC Trusts reported that they did not hold any information on numbers of consultants who had opted out.

The Department has no plans to introduce mechanisms to record external hours worked by consultants contracted to do health and social care work. Consultants are required to inform their clinical manager, as part of the job planning process, of all their activities, including any private commitments.

Visual Impairment: Internet Access

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number and percentage of people with a visual impairment who cannot access internet services.

(AQW 26802/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Hospitals: Removal of Equipment

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what guidance is provided to in-patients on the temporary removal of electronic medical equipment from hospitals.

(AQW 26857/11-15)

Mr Poots: Trusts are required to follow the guidance of the Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in relation to Medical Device and to have policies and procedures in place for their management.

On the prescription and loan of medical devices (including electronic devices) to Patients the amount and type of guidance and information provided to the patient, carer or relatives depends on the specific piece of equipment, the length of time that the equipment is likely to be required by the patient and the level of patient interaction required for the safe use of the equipment.

For short term use of a medical device within a hospital setting guidance is provided to patients that is limited to its immediate use including seeking clinical assistance in the event of an alarm.

For long term use, where the patient is discharged from the hospital with the equipment, additional guidance and instruction are provided covering the safe use, care and return of the equipment.

Medical Cards: Fraud

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the scale of fraud in securing Medical Cards; and what is the resulting cost to the public purse.

(AQW 26864/11-15)

Mr Poots: Whilst there is a variance in the number of medical cards and the NI population figures this is not a NI specific issue and applies equally across the UK. There are many reasons for this:

- Patients who have died outside the jurisdiction or who have emigrated out of the UK but who did not notify their GP practice or the relevant authority when they left; and
- Patients who are registered in more than one practice simultaneously.

NI specific reasons include:

- Cross border workers – these are people who work and pay taxes in Northern Ireland and are therefore entitled to access health services in NI; and
- Non entitled cross border users – people who are resident in the Republic of Ireland but who inappropriately or fraudulently access health services in Northern Ireland by providing a Northern Ireland address to the GP practice.

To obtain a Medical Card, applicants must complete a registration form at a GP practice, which is signed and dated by the applicant and the GP, and then forwarded to the BSO with the required documentation for validation. If the documentation is in order and the ordinarily resident test is satisfied then the registration is authorised and the patient is issued with a medical card. If the registration cannot be authorised because the documentation is incomplete or insufficient, and the ordinarily resident is not satisfied, then the BSO informs the Practice and the applicant and the registration is declined.

As I outlined in my statement to the Assembly on 15 October 2013 the true extent of fraud in HSC and indeed across the whole of the UK is not known, however, there is already a significant amount of counter fraud work being undertaken by the HSC's Counter Fraud Unit which employs a team of trained specialised staff. Fraud is wrong, unethical, immoral and unlawful. We all pay the price and front line services suffer. I am committed to developing a real anti-fraud culture, where everyone regards fraud as unacceptable and understands their role in eliminating it. I would therefore encourage everyone to report fraud or suspected fraud through the HSC Hotline or the HSC's website and ensure that our scarce health resources are directed to delivering services to those who need them most and who are genuinely entitled.

Medical Cards: Fraud

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are in place to prevent Medical Cards being fraudulently obtained.

(AQW 26865/11-15)

Mr Poots: Whilst there is a variance in the number of medical cards and the NI population figures this is not a NI specific issue and applies equally across the UK. There are many reasons for this:

- Patients who have died outside the jurisdiction or who have emigrated out of the UK but who did not notify their GP practice or the relevant authority when they left; and
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Medical Services to ROI Citizens

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been recovered in each of the last five years from the Republic of Ireland in respect of medical services provided in Northern Ireland to citizens of the Republic.

(AQW 26866/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available because the HSC Trusts gather information on non-UK patients in different ways. It is not possible for them to identify Republic of Ireland from other EEA visitors or via which route they accessed treatment.

Dry Age-related Macular Degeneration

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what current work is being done to assist in the treatment of people diagnosed with dry age-related macular degeneration.

(AQW 26874/11-15)

Mr Poots: Currently, there is no treatment for dry age-related macular degeneration but research is ongoing to find a treatment. In Northern Ireland, if patients with dry age-related macular degeneration experience change in vision they can be assessed by an ophthalmologist at the Hospital Eye Department. Low Vision Rehabilitation and Low Vision Services are available here to provide patients with practical and emotional support to allow them to understand their diagnosis, deal with sight loss and help maintain independence. In addition, information and advice can be obtained from the Macular Disease Society and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

Slieve Roe Residential Care Home, Kilkeel

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the urgent funding arrangements for Residential Care, Respite and Rehabilitation at Slieve Roe Residential Care Home, Kilkeel.
(AQW 26876/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Trust has advised that there are no urgent funding arrangements in place for Slieve Roe Residential Care Home as it is core funded. The 2013/14 Budget for Slieve Roe is £515,644.

Mental Illness and Learning Disability: Definitions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the definition of (i) mental illness; and (ii) learning disability, as endorsed or adopted by Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 26916/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland the legal definitions of mental illness and mental handicap (learning disability) are set out in section 3 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, as follows:

- (i) "mental illness" - means a state of mind which effects a person's thinking, perceiving, emotion or judgement to the extent that he requires care or medical treatment in his own interests or the interests of other persons; and
- (ii) "mental handicap" (now known as learning disability) - means a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind which includes significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning.

Learning Disability: Transition Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to young people with learning disabilities who attend special schools and are in preparation for Post-19, which Health and Social Care Trusts have (i) a Strategic Transitions Officer; or (ii) a similar person or team liaising with schools and the children's parents or carers; and to list the relevant job titles in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 26917/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Health and Social Care Trusts that:

- (i) there are no posts with the title Strategic Transitions Officer; and
- (ii) the relevant job titles/teams are as follows:

Health & Social Care Trust	Title
Belfast HSC Trust	Transition Officers
Northern HSC Trust	Children's Services Team
Southern HSC Trust	Transition Co-ordinators
South Eastern HSC Trust	Children's Disability Team
Western HSC Trust	Transition Social Workers

The above persons/teams work in close association with schools, young people and their parents/carers and also interface with adult services.

Incontinence: Children

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the guidelines, in each Health and Social Care Trust, relating to the provision of appropriate incontinence pads for children where medical conditions exist that show extreme need.
(AQW 26929/11-15)

Mr Poots: Trusts in Northern Ireland follow regionally agreed guidance in relation to the management of continence in children and the provision of suitable products.

Children are assessed by a health care practitioner by the age of 4 years and based on that, an appropriate product will be selected. Children receive 5 products per 24 hours but can be issued with more if their condition requires this. The child will be reviewed on a 6-12 monthly basis or more frequently if needed.

Translation: Cost

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of translation services incurred by each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years, broken down by language.

(AQW 26936/11-15)

Mr Poots: Translation service costs include written, face to face interpreting and spoken word. The cost of translation services incurred by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

	2012/13 £	2011/12 £	2010/11 £	Total by HSC Trust £
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	717,799	536,462	448,576	1,702,837
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	364,641	309,832	295,496	969,969
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	119,151	115,391	93,600	328,142
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	1,358,177	924,136	919,977	3,202,290
Western Health & Social Care Trust	216,809	220,052	166,239	603,100
NI Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust	995	1,268	2,357	4,620
Total	£2,777,572	£2,107,141	£1,926,245	£6,810,958

Due to disproportionate costs it is not possible to provide a breakdown of these costs by language.

Translation: Instances

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of instances where translation services were provided to patients in each Health and Social Care Trusts in each of the last three years, broken down by service provider.

(AQW 26937/11-15)

Mr Poots: Translation services include instances of written, face to face interpreting and spoken word. The number of instances where translation services were provided to patients in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years is set out in the table below. The service was provided by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS).

	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	Total by HSC Trust
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	22,358	17,812	15,072	55,242
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	11,959	8,270	7,198	27,427
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	3,582	3,214	2,430	9,226
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	40,925	34,708	29,221	104,854
Western Health & Social Care Trust	6,311	5,301	4,474	16,086
Total	85,135	69,305	58,395	212,835

It is not possible to provide information on the number of instances of translations regarding the NI Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust.

DHSSPS: Disability

Mr Lytle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 26954/11-15)

Mr Poots: As required by the Disability Discrimination Act, the DHSSPS has a Disability Action Plan (DAP) setting out how it will meet the statutory duties to: promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and encourage participation by disabled people in public life. The Department prepares an annual report to the Equality Commission which includes a section on the progress made in delivering on the actions in the DAP. The DAP and Annual Progress Reports are available on the Department's website.

Through various policies, strategies and standards my Department aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Northern Ireland, including those living with disabilities, their families and carers. Recent examples include:-

- the development of a new public health strategic framework;
- service frameworks for mental health, learning disability and older people;

- Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy (2012);
- Delivering the Bamford Vision Action Plans (2009/11 and 2012/15);
- the forthcoming cross-Departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan.

I fully support a greater focus on health promotion, prevention, protection and early intervention to improve health and wellbeing. Person centred care is essential for those who need it and I endorse "home as the hub of care". These are some of the principles underpinning the reform of health and social care services as set out in Transforming Your Care - Vision to Action (2012).

Cystic Fibrosis: G551D

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with the G551D cystic fibrosis mutation.

(AQW 26956/11-15)

Mr Poots: Currently there are 37 patients in Northern Ireland identified as having the G551D gene (21 adults and 16 children).

Of these a total of 21 patients have commenced ivacaftor treatment (13 adults and 8 children). Numbers are expected to rise as children become clinically suitable for ivacaftor treatment.

Cystic Fibrosis: G551D: Ivacaftor Prescription

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been prescribed ivacaftor for treatment of the G551D cystic fibrosis mutation; and whether this treatment is funded by the Health Service.

(AQW 26959/11-15)

Mr Poots: Currently there are 37 patients in Northern Ireland identified as having the G551D gene (21 adults and 16 children).

Of these a total of 21 patients have commenced ivacaftor treatment (13 adults and 8 children). Numbers are expected to rise as children become clinically suitable for ivacaftor treatment.

Cystic Fibrosis: G551D: Ivacaftor Discount

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to seek a discount deal with drug suppliers, similar to that which has made it possible for the drug ivacaftor to be prescribed under the National Health Service for patients diagnosed with the G551D cystic fibrosis mutation in England, or whether the deal agreed in England can be extended here.

(AQW 26964/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland medicines are commissioned in line with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) commissioning priorities and in accordance with: the medicine's marketing authorisation; NICE Technology Appraisals; and other evidence based sources, where applicable. Arrangements for agreeing the cost of commissioned treatments are therefore a matter for the HSCB.

Rare Diseases: Individual Funding Requests

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 26205/11-15 and AQW 26206/11-15, how many patients, suffering from rare diseases, have been refused treatment through the Individual Funding Request process, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26972/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) does not hold the information requested in the form requested. Whilst the HSCB maintains a database of all Individual Funding Requests, this does not include information about whether a patient has a rare disease.

Abortion: Guidance Review

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to review the draft abortion guidelines following the case of Sarah Ewart.

(AQW 27000/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials are considering the implications of emerging issues and consultation responses on the draft guidance document. However, any guidance produced by the Department can only represent the law as it has been interpreted by the Northern Ireland courts, guidance does not supersede the law.

Northern Trust: Care Home Beds

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 25949/11-15, to detail (i) why he was unable to provide the information for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as at 1 September 2013; (ii) whether he has since sought the information; and (iii) whether he will now provide it.

(AQW 27011/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information for the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust as at 1 September 2013 was not included because the returns required for this information were not available to the Northern HSC Trust when the initial request was received.

This information has now been supplied and can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Beds and Residents¹ in Statutory Residential Care Homes.

Northern HSC Trust	1 September 2013	
Roddens	Beds	29
	Residents	22
Rathmoyle	Beds	39
	Residents	17
Pinewood	Beds	36
	Residents	22
Rosedale	Beds	30
	Residents	23
Greenisland ²	Beds	-
	Residents	-
Clonmore	Beds	40
	Residents	20
Lisgarel	Beds	40
	Residents	32
Westlands	Beds	29
	Residents	18
Joymount	Beds	40
	Residents	35

1 Residents refers to all occupants at 1/9/13, this is not limited to permanent residents and could include others, for example those on short breaks.

2 Greenisland House was closed as at 1/9/13.

Zero-hours Contracts

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many providers of domiciliary care, commissioned by Health and Social Care Trusts, use zero hour contracts.

(AQW 27021/11-15)

Mr Poots: Providers of domiciliary care are not contractually compelled to disclose to Health and Social Care Trusts the detail of the terms and conditions of employment for the staff they employ. Consequently, these figures are not available.

Domiciliary Care

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when commissioning providers for domiciliary care from the independent sector, what weight is given to (i) quality of care; and (ii) cost

(AQW 27023/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board and HSC Trusts have a duty to ensure that quality services are procured and delivered in response to assessed need at a cost that represents best value for money. In fulfilling this duty, it is recognised that both quality and price are key components of social care procurement. The HSC Board is currently developing best practice guidance for the procurement of social care services.

Individual contracts remain the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts which commission domiciliary care across a wide range of programmes of care. In this context specific decisions about quality and cost rest with Trusts and may vary as Trusts seek to achieve a balance between cost and quality.

Software Procurement

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether guidelines are provided to Health and Social Care Trusts when procuring new software to prioritise providers that offer programmes compatible with existing infrastructure.

(AQW 27024/11-15)

Mr Poots: As part of public procurement processes, the requirement for compatibility with existing IT systems (whether essential or desirable) is typically specified within the statement of requirements documentation alongside any other service/operational requirements. Prospective bidders must demonstrate compliance with these requirements in order to be deemed suitable for appointment. The extent to which prospective bidders meet the specification of requirements is considered as part of the overall tender evaluation process.

Injectables Industry: Regulation

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to regulate the 'injectables' industry, such as botox and dermal fillers.

(AQW 27043/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health (DoH) published a report "Review of the Regulation of Cosmetic Interventions" in April 2013. The report is available to view or download from:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192028/Review_of_the_Regulation_of_Cosmetic_Interventions.pdf

My Department is considering the report.

Mater Hospital: Emergency Department

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many patients the Mater Hospital Emergency Department has treated in each of the last three years; and (ii) how many transfers had to be made to other hospitals due to the appropriate staff not being in place in the Mater.

(AQW 27051/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information on the number of patients attending emergency care departments each year is available to view or download from:
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency-care-stats.htm
- (ii) During the last three years, the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust has indicated that no patients were transferred from the Mater Emergency Care Department due to the appropriate staff not being in place. However the Belfast HSC Trust reported that 2,953 patients were transferred to other hospitals from the Mater emergency care department based on clinical decisions during the last three years.

Mater Hospital: Emergency Department

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients (i) were treated; and (ii) were not treated, by the Mater Hospital's Emergency Department within his Department's 4 hour target time, in each month of the last three years.

(AQW 27052/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on emergency care waiting times is published quarterly and is available to view or download from:
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

Ulster Hospital: Ambulance Admission Quota

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Ulster Hospital plans to introduce quotas for admitting ambulance patients.

(AQW 27066/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust does not have any plans to introduce quotas for admitting ambulance patients to the Ulster Hospital. The Health and Social Care Board is working with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to ensure that the transportation of emergency patients brought by ambulance to all acute hospital sites is managed in a way that ensures patients have timely access to appropriate clinical care in emergency departments. Effective management of ambulance arrivals will help to manage demand and equalise pressures for unscheduled care across the region and minimise ambulance turnaround times at emergency departments.

Individual Funding Request

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process which patients can use to get drugs not yet approved for general use, does not become an inequitable process favouring young, middle-class and articulate applicants over more suitable vulnerable people who cannot speak up for themselves, which was the finding of the Scottish Parliament on a similar process.

(AQW 27073/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health matters in each of the UK's regions are devolved and it is appropriate that I comment only on the issues within Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland patients do not apply for access to drugs therefore there is no possibility of the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process affording advantage to one social class over another. The Northern Ireland IFR process provides a mechanism to consider requests from consultant physicians for treatments that fall outside the range of services normally commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board. Each request must be supported by the relevant Trust manager and clinical director. Decisions are based on clinical evidence and suitability, and personal circumstances are not taken into consideration.

Carer Assessments

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of carer assessments offered over the last three years were accepted, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 27114/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on accepted carers' assessments is not available centrally. However the Department holds figures on completed carers' assessments. Table 1 below sets out the completed assessments as a proportion of all carers' assessments offered. This information is available quarterly since June 2011 only.

Table 1. Proportion of Offered Carers' Assessments Completed.

HSC Trust	Quarter Ending									Average
	Jun-11	Sep-11	Dec-11	Mar-12	Jun-12	Sep-12	Dec-12	Mar-13	Jun-13	
Belfast	69%	55%	54%	45%	56%	50%	25%	60%	61%	56%
Northern	55%	50%	47%	46%	50%	53%	56%	39%	50%	54%
South Eastern	31%	64%	27%	79%	32%	65%	21%	75%	31%	28%
Southern	39%	66%	38%	63%	39%	52%	47%	51%	46%	46%
Western	51%	52%	60%	48%	49%	36%	55%	56%	49%	46%
Northern Ireland	50%	58%	40%	61%	44%	53%	36%	59%	45%	45%

Source: Carers' Statistics for Northern Ireland (Community Information Branch)

Hospital Admission: Waiting List

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are on a waiting list for admission to hospital.

(AQW 27163/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department collects information on the number of patients waiting, and length of time waiting, for Ordinary and Day Case admission, at Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland. This is published quarterly by the Department and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/waiting_times_main/stats-waiting-times.htm

Mater Hospital: Maternity Admissions

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many admissions the Mater Hospital Maternity unit has had in each month of the last three years; and how many live births there were at the Mater Hospital in each month of the last three years.

(AQW 27184/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- i) Information on the number of admissions the Mater Hospital Maternity unit has had in each month of the last three years is not collected by the Department. However information is collected on the number of admissions under the Maternity and Child Health Programme of Care at the Mater Hospital for each of the last three years by quarter and is detailed in the below table.

Quarter Ending	Year		
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
June	694	607	555
September	618	756	690
December	689	725	668
March	638	692	518
Total	2,639	2,780	2,431

Source: Departmental Return KH03a

- ii) Information on the number of live births at the Mater Hospital in each month for each of the last three years is not collected by the Department. However information is collected by quarter and detailed in the below table.

Quarter Ending	Year		
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
June	305	268	286
September	283	335	304
December	318	323	297
March	293	313	232
Total	1,199	1,239	1,119

Source: Departmental Return KP19

Suicide and Self-harm: STORM

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the STORM assessment, devised by the University of Manchester, has been adopted by Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 27207/11-15)

Mr Poots: The PHA funded STORM and Self-Harm training for the five local Health and Social Care Trusts from January 2013 – May 2013. Forty one staff across the five Health and Social Care Trusts participated in the 3 day training programme during this period.

Through its 2013-14 Mental Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention Training Action Plan, the Public Health Agency will fund further training for emergency department and mental health staff which will include elements of the STORM programme.

Haemochromatosis

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are diagnosed with Haemochromatosis.

(AQW 27268/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people diagnosed with Haemochromatosis is not available.

However, information is available on the number of patients admitted to hospital with a primary diagnosis of Haemochromatosis. During 2012/13 there were 725 individuals admitted to HSC hospitals in Northern Ireland with a primary diagnosis of Haemochromatosis.

Abortion: Draft Guidance

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he received direct legal advice from the Attorney General in relation to his Department's draft Guidance document for Health and Social Care Professionals on the limited circumstances for a lawful termination of pregnancy.

(AQW 27319/11-15)

Mr Poots: As the member will be aware there is a strong convention that whether the Attorney General has been consulted is not disclosed and I do not intend to breach that convention.

Abortion: Draft Guidance

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will publish the full legal advice he received when drafting his Department's draft guidance document, of April 2013, for Health and Social Care professionals on the limited circumstances for a lawful termination of pregnancy.

(AQW 27351/11-15)

Mr Poots: Legal advice received by my Department is subject to legal professional privilege. It is not my intention to release this advice.

Department of Justice

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail whether the additional funding from unspent money from the Police Gratuity Reserve Scheme will be allocated solely to new schemes; or as a general support fund for relevant police charities and organisations.

(AQW 26765/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The new Part-Time Reserve (PTR) Support Programme, totalling £383,000, is in addition to the individual gratuities made available to former PTR officers by the Government on the devolution of justice. It will provide specific support to help those who served in the PTR, both for those in financial hardship and for others engaged in training and education to enhance their employment opportunities. The programme will be administered through a number of policing charities and will be available to all former members of the police PTR, both RUC GC and PSNI, to members' dependants and the surviving partner of any past member now deceased.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity: Charities

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail which charities will be allocated funds from the £383,000 remaining in the Police Reserve Fund; and to provide a breakdown of the allocation.

(AQW 26769/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is proposed to disburse the monies among a number of policing charities in line with defined criteria. Officials from my Department are currently developing the Part-Time Reserve (PTR) Support Programme and arrangements for the distribution of the funding.

The proportion of the total funding to be allocated to each of the identified charities within the policing family will vary from charity to charity, based on their engagement with and support for former PTR officers and their capacity and capability to manage the programme.

I hope to be in a position to announce the breakdown of the allocation of the funding to the various charities soon.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice, with regard to the new £383,000 fund set up to support former part-time reservists and their dependents, to detail (i) the criteria that will determine those entitled to support; (ii) when funds will be distributed; and (iii) the organisations that will manage and distribute the funds.

(AQW 26775/11-15)

Mr Ford: My officials are currently developing the Part-Time Reserve support programme and arrangements for the distribution of the funding. It is envisaged that approximately £43,000 will be made available in the first year, with an additional £85,000 made available for each of the four following years. It will provide specific support to help those who served in the PTR, both for those in financial hardship and for others engaged in training and education to enhance their employment opportunities.

The programme will be administered through a number of policing charities and will be available to all former members of the police PTR, both RUC GC and PSNI, to members' dependants and the surviving partner of any past member now deceased.

Hydebank Wood: Education

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of young offenders in prison who are (i) studying for GCSE or equivalent qualifications; and (ii) not enrolled in educational programmes.

(AQW 26878/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) had a total of 177 Young Offenders detained at Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre on 10 October 2013.

There was a total of five young offenders engaged in studying for GCSE or equivalent qualifications at this time.

On the same date 62 (35%) young offenders were not enrolled in educational programmes.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the revised Northern Ireland Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline is operational and if so, when it became operational; and if he will place a copy in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 26894/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer to the responses provided to the Member on 14 October 2013 to AQW/26396/11-15 and on 10 October 2013 to AQW/26228/11-15.

Women's Prison: Belvoir Park Hospital Site

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the continuing call for a women's prison to be established on a separate site, whether he has given consideration to use the former Belvoir Park Hospital site.

(AQW 26895/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I informed the Assembly on 19 March, my intention is to develop a new, separate facility for women offenders combining both custodial provision for those women requiring secure custody and facilities for those women for whom a community based approach is more appropriate. NIPS Officials are currently investigating the feasibility of developing such a facility on lands already owned by NIPS. In the event these lands prove to be unsuitable for the development of a women's prison, then alternative sites including those such as Belvoir Park Hospital, will be considered.

Cigarette Seizures

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the seizure of illegal cigarettes in each of the last five years, how many were counterfeit and how many were legally produced but had been smuggled.

(AQW 26955/11-15)

Mr Ford: HMRC, who have responsibility for excise evasion offences, have confirmed that it is not possible to provide this breakdown from the statistics they hold, which are on cigarettes generally.

Tobacco Seizures

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice how much illegal hand rolling tobacco has been seized in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26957/11-15)

Mr Ford: HMRC, who have responsibility for excise evasion offences, have provided the following figures for hand rolling tobacco:

		2013/14 (Apr-Sep)	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
HMRC	No of Seizures	229	1,044	1,567	1,596	1,854
	Quantity (kilos)	15,619	67,872	56,295	46,741	29,965
Border Force	No of Seizures	5,576	12,552	11,533	10,814	18,130
	Quantity (kilos)	155,641	359,635	508,112	314,775	360,988

Illegal Cigarette Trade

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice whether there is evidence to suggest that people involved in the illegal cigarette trade are also involved in other criminal activities such as the production/sale of counterfeit goods, drugs smuggling, human trafficking.

(AQW 26958/11-15)

Mr Ford: While some organised crime groups focus on one area of activity many are involved in a range of illicit activities.

Experience shows that once an importation route has been opened up by a group for one purpose it can then be used to import a variety of illicit goods.

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice to detail his Department's performance against the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women.

(AQW 26982/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 17 July 2013, the United Nations Committee that oversees the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) formally examined the UK's performance in terms of its CEDAW obligations. Officials from my Department (along with officials from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Social Development took part in the Examination in Geneva and via a live video link in London. I understand that all Northern Ireland Departments contributed to the briefing material for the Examination.

The CEDAW Committee has now published its Concluding Observations based on the Examination. Most of the recommendations contained in the Concluding Observations are general and apply to all parts of the UK. The CEDAW Committee also made six recommendations that specifically relate to Northern Ireland and refer to:

- Equality legislation;
- The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry;
- Payment for sexual services from a child;
- The role of women in peacebuilding;
- Abortion law; and
- Equal access to reproductive treatment.

OFMDFM has overarching responsibility for ensuring that CEDAW is implemented here. CEDAW is implemented via the Gender Equality Strategy (GES), which includes Departmental Gender Equality Actions (GEAs). GES is currently under review by OFMDFM. My Department does not have gender equality actions linked to GES because justice was not devolved when the Strategy was being developed.

However, as part of the review of GES, OFMDFM officials are working with my officials to develop GEAs and consider how, if appropriate, these might reflect CEDAW recommendations.

Judicial Reviews

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many judicial reviews are currently in the court system at any stage of application or hearing, and of these, how many are under anonymity orders.

(AQW 27008/11-15)

Mr Ford: At 11 October 2013 there were 230 judicial reviews in the court system, 29 of which are subject to anonymity orders.

Prisons: Strip-searching

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when strip-searching, or any other term used, of female prisoners in Hydebank Wood Prison was reduced or halted as per the remarks of the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and on whose instructions.

(AQW 27009/11-15)

Mr Ford: In common with arrangements for all types of prisoner, female prisoners at Hydebank Wood may still be subject to full searches. This measure only takes place in response to specific intelligence. This has been the case since the Inspection and was determined locally with the approval of Prison Service Headquarters. Such action has only taken place on a limited number of occasions over the course of the present year.

Following the publication of the Criminal Justice Inspection Report on 1 October 2013, a review has also begun of the establishment's overall searching arrangements for female prisoners, including those relating to Visits. This review is expected to recommend the introduction by the end of the present year of further revised procedures which will be fully in line with the Report's related recommendations.

Hydebank Wood: CJI Reports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the remarks made by Professor Phil Scruton following the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland reports of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison in which he describes the Northern Ireland Prison Service as in "a downward spiral" evidenced by "a catalogue of failures which is deeply institutionalised and systemic".

(AQW 27010/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Governor and his team at Hydebank Wood are addressing the major issues of concern found in the recent inspection reports.

Reforming our prisons is a key priority and implementing the necessary change will take time. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently half way through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the organisations that will deal with any surplus funds following the payment of gratuity to part time members of the RUC and PSNI; (ii) the audit arrangements that will be in place; and (iii) whether any charge will be made for the management/distribution of the funds.

(AQW 27031/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is proposed to disburse the monies among a number of policing charities in line with defined criteria. Officials from my Department are currently finalising the administrative, funding and audit arrangements for the Part-Time Reserve (PTR) Support Programme and I hope to be in a position to confirm these shortly.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice whether any discussions had were with the part time Reserve representatives of the RUC George Cross prior to the decision being taken on surplus funds available following the payment of the gratuity to part time members of the RUC and the PSNI.

(AQW 27032/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prior to my decision to approve the setting up of a new Part Time Reserve Support Programme, I held discussions with a number of representatives of former part-time Reserve officers and I will continue to engage with representatives in setting up the programme.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice when he will make the first payments of the surplus funds available following the payment of the gratuity to part time members of the RUC and the PSNI and on what basis will payments be made.

(AQW 27033/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is envisaged that approximately £43,000 will be made available in this financial year, with an additional £85,000 made available for each of the four following years.

Officials from my Department are currently finalising the administrative, funding and audit arrangements for the Part-Time Reserve Support Programme and I hope to be in a position to confirm these shortly.

Legal Aid

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to consider alternative proposals, regarding the proposed changes to Legal Aid payments, at a meeting scheduled to be held by the Law Society on 19 October 2013.

(AQW 27053/11-15)

Mr Ford: I attended the Law Society's conference on legal aid on 19 October. Although no specific proposals to address the current financial situation were made, I will listen carefully to any representations made by the Society in respect of my proposals on legal aid.

Unpaid Fines

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how he plans to reduce to amount of unpaid fines.

(AQW 27067/11-15)

Mr Ford: My officials in the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service continue to operate a Fine Collection Service to engage with defendants to secure payment of fines without the need to resort to enforcement action.

Following the recent judicial review challenges to the enforcement procedures my officials have been working with the Judiciary to implement revised arrangements which are consistent with the Divisional Court's judgment.

In relation to the Crown Court, new procedures have been agreed and officials are in the process of relisting Belfast cases where a fine remains outstanding. Those cases which are not based in Belfast will be relisted later this term.

In relation to the Magistrates' Courts, my officials are seeking further clarification from the Divisional Court but, if this does not address the concerns, it may be necessary to bring forward legislation.

The execution of warrants issued for unpaid fines remains an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

It is my intention to bring forward legislation during the current Assembly mandate to establish a new fine collection and enforcement service which will be able to avail of a wider range of collection options.

Appeals Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 26486/11-15, whether this applies to appellants appearing in benefit tribunals and their advocates, and if so, to detail (i) which agency is responsible for addressing customer complaints; and (ii) how the agency is accountable.

(AQW 27079/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS), is responsible for the administration of The Appeals Service (TAS) under a Service Level Agreement with the Department for Social Development. As such the corporate values and customer service standards of the NICTS also apply to tribunal appellants and their advocates. Complaints regarding the administration of TAS tribunals are the responsibility of NICTS. Complaints regarding the personal conduct of tribunal panel members are a matter for the President of Appeal Tribunals and the Lord Chief Justice.

The NICTS has comprehensive customer complaints procedures which include escalation mechanisms and referral of complaints to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman through an MLA if required.

Benefit Appeal Tribunals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Benefit Appeals Tribunals and potential disputes, to detail (i) what accountability or regulation exists for the Chair/legally qualified member of the panel; and (ii) what plans he has to allow a written version of events from appellants/advocates to be considered in the event of dispute, as opposed to only that recorded by the Chair/legally qualified member.

(AQW 27083/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Article 8(3)(a) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 provides that where there is more than one member of the tribunal panel the President nominates one of the members as the chairman. In practice this is the legal member of the tribunal. The procedure of the tribunal is the responsibility of the legally qualified member of the tribunal.

Article 15 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 provides a right of appeal to the Social Security and Child Support Commissioner from the decision of a tribunal on a point of law. This extends to procedural determinations of the chairman under Regulation 49 of the Social Security and Child Support (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. Procedural rulings can also be challenged through Judicial Review proceedings.

Tribunals are Judicial bodies and as such are bound by Article 6 of the Human Rights Act and must provide a fair hearing. All members of the tribunal are Judicial office holders.

The Lord Chief Justice has sole statutory responsibility for determining complaints about the conduct of judicial office holders. He has delegated the responsibility for complaints about tribunal members to the President of Tribunals, with a review carried out by The Lord Chief Justice if requested. The issues that fall for investigation and how complaints are to be investigated is set out in his Code of Practice on Complaints about the Conduct of Judicial Office Holders.

The President is the judicial head of appeal tribunals. His functions are set out in Schedule (1) paragraphs 7 to 10 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. The President is responsible for his conduct to the Lord Chief Justice.

- (ii) An appellant or advocate can make a note of proceedings at an appeal tribunal hearing. This note can be provided to the legal member of the tribunal in connection with an application for leave to appeal to the Commissioner. It may also be forwarded with any complaint about conduct for consideration by the Complaints Officer and the President of tribunals under the Lord Chief Justice's Code of Practice.

Prisons: Research

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given the high importance of independent rigorous research, whether he plans to allow and/or invite Professor Phil Scraton and Dr Linda Moore to carry out research in local prisons, without the necessity of pre-conditions as suggested by the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and whether they will be excluded as a result of their previous objective findings.

(AQW 27086/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is working closely with Queens University Belfast (QUB) to develop a programme of research to support the Prison Reform Programme.

A QUB Research Impact Manager is helping NIPS to make sure that the research done in prisons adds value and supports NIPS in improving outcomes for prisoners and building safer communities. The current focus is on how best to harness research findings to effect organisational change, and NIPS has been able to speak to QUB colleagues who are best suited to inform and guide this programme of work.

Access to prisons to conduct research needs to be properly considered and carefully managed so that there is a balance between opening up our prisons and managing any disruption to the routines and regimes. NIPS is very keen to work with researchers and academic institutions and will continue to discuss how best to do this alongside the demands of the reform programme and running the prisons.

NIPS' next meeting with QUB colleagues is in early November.

Prison Service: Director General

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to take action to have the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service withdraw her remarks which called the credibility of Professor Phil Scraton's forty year prison research experience into question and for his assessment of whether an apology should be provided to the Professor.

(AQW 27135/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the Director General did not challenge the credibility of Professor Scraton's prison work and at the time clarified any inference that he might have drawn from her comments.

I support the Director General's commitment to work with a wide range of stakeholders during this challenging period of reform. I am also encouraged that so many stakeholders are willing to engage in full and frank discussions about how this can be successfully achieved.

Offender Levy and Victims of Crime Fund

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 26780/11-15, how charities or support groups can apply for finance from the Offender Levy Fund; and to outline the criteria required to apply.

(AQW 27138/11-15)

Mr Ford: Funding for local initiatives taken forward by groups working with victims in the community is channelled through the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships. This is directed specifically towards the start-up funding of new projects or for providing one-off funding to new time-limited projects that will help support victims and witnesses in the criminal justice process. Therefore, interested charities or support groups should make representation to their local Policing and Community Safety Partnership who can advise them of the Victims of Crime Fund and other possible funding opportunities. The Victims of Crime Fund is not an open competition grant scheme.

Access NI: Working with Young People

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why (i) it is necessary to complete separate Access NI forms per role at an individual cost of £30 per assessment for people seeking clearance to work with children and vulnerable adults; (ii) one form could not be completed and updated annually, and the result(s) made available to those agencies, clubs, charities etc. requiring the person in question to be cleared.

(AQW 27140/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current legislation would not permit the introduction of a scheme as suggested in the question. Specifically, the legislation requires applications for enhanced checks to be made on the basis of a “prescribed purpose”, in other words a specific position or job. This can impact on the information that is provided, thus limiting the ability of the check to be used for other positions. In addition, the legislation would have to be changed to enable checks to be updated annually; this would need to attract a fee as AccessNI operates a cost recovery model.

I have, however, accepted a recommendation made by Sunita Mason, the Independent Advisor for Criminality Information in England and Wales, that a system of portable disclosures should be introduced in Northern Ireland. Under this employers or the appointing body could undertake a free online check of the information in the disclosure. This would flag if there were changes. This new system requires legislative provision and the introduction of significant changes to the current computer system. I am planning to introduce the former in the next Justice Bill. The work on the changes to the computer system has begun.

Once the change is implemented, citizens may not need to re-apply for an AccessNI check as they move between employers.

National Crime Agency: Northern Ireland

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what recent discussions he has held with the Chief Constable on the implications of an increase in organised crime as a result of the National Crime Agency not operating fully in Northern Ireland or on the same basis as the rest of the UK.

(AQW 27143/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have had a number of discussions with the Chief Constable and other senior officers about the implications of the National Crime Agency not operating fully in Northern Ireland. The most recent discussion with the Chief Constable was on 9 October 2013.

Access NI: Working with Young People

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Justice how many checks have been carried out by Access NI for those working with young people, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 27154/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information is not held in the format requested. The table below, however, sets out the number of applications made for enhanced criminal record checks in each of the last three years where the registered body asked for the applicant's details to be checked against the lists of those persons who are prevented from working with children (column A) or the lists of those prevented from working with both children and adults (column B):

Year	Applications received –check of children's list (A)	Applications received –check of children and adults lists (B)	Total
April 2012 – March 2013	9,044	71,683	80,727
April 2011 March 2012	7,674	78,529	86,203
April 2010 – March 2011	10,678	79,542	90,220

These figures do not include those individuals working with children, for example supervised volunteers, where employers are entitled to an enhanced criminal record check, but not to request a check of the lists.

Police Dogs

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice how many police dogs have been put down in each of the last five years.
(AQW 27200/11-15)

Mr Ford: This matter is the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I am committed to respecting the independence of the Police Service therefore you may wish to direct your question to the Chief Constable.

Prison Service: Misconduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 26396/11-15, to clarify (i) whether on suspicion of the commission of criminal or misconduct offences that the facts will be, as opposed to should be, referred to Professional Standards; (ii) the meaning of the terms Functional Head or Senior Manager in relation to operational prison staff; (iii) the number of Northern Ireland Prison Service operational/administrative staff by grade that have received training including Prison Officers' Association representatives, when it was delivered, its duration and by which agency; (iv) the grades of Investigating Officers; and (v) whether he will leave a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Professional Standards Unit and Guidance to Managers on Disciplinary Investigations and Hearings in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 27208/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The wording in the answer to AQW/26396/11-15 is correct. The Professional Code of Conduct, which was agreed by all key stakeholders, clearly states that where there is suspicion that one or more persons may be involved in misconduct a Functional Head or the Senior Manager should refer the case to the Professional Standards Unit for investigation.
- (ii) Functional Head is an operational Prison Service grade in the new Prison Service management structure. It is broadly equivalent to the old Governor 2 – 4 grades. The Unit Manager grade is broadly equivalent to the old Governor 5 and Principal Officer grades. In the context of the new Code of Conduct a Senior Manager can be anyone from Unit Manager grade upwards or a grade 7 administrative grade upwards.
- (iii) In August and September 2013 a total of 83 staff, including 18 POA representatives, received a one day training course on the new Code of Conduct at the Prison Service College. This is broken down by grade as follows:

Grade	Number
Director General	1
Governing Governor	3
Functional Head	6
Unit Manager	26
Training Officer	13
POA Representative	18
Grade 7	4
Deputy Principal	1
Staff Officer	1
Executive Officer 1	1
Executive Officer 2	3
Administrative Officer	4
Administrative Assistant	2

- (iv) There are 3 full time Investigating Officers at Headquarters and they are graded as follows:

- 1 Grade 7
- 1 Unit manager
- 1 administrative Staff Officer

There are also a further 3 Unit Managers at Headquarters who can be called upon to do investigations as and when necessary.

- (v) The Terms of Reference for the Professional Standards Unit and guidance for managers on disciplinary investigations and hearings are set out in the Professional Code of Conduct.

Hydebank Wood: Essential Skills

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Justice, given the recent report by Criminal Justice Inspection into conditions for young offenders at Hydebank Wood, what plans he has to ensure that increased opportunities to develop essential literacy and numeracy skills are available to all.

(AQO 4830/11-15)

Mr Ford: A recent review of the learning and Skills provision for prisoners has recommended the introduction of a new curriculum that concentrates on the provision of essential skills in English, Maths and ICT. It also recommends that the service delivery of Learning and Skills services should be outsourced. Work is underway to deliver these recommendations.

Work is also ongoing to develop plans for the creation of a secure college at Hydebank Wood, focussed upon developing prisoners' essential skills and enhancing their prospects for employment post release.

Justice Bill

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice when he will introduce the Faster, Fairer Justice Bill to the Assembly.

(AQO 4831/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department has a final print of the draft Justice Bill and is currently working through the pre-introduction procedures. Subject to securing the required agreements, and progression on the Department's wider legislative programme, I plan to introduce the Bill to the Assembly in January 2014. As the member will know, this Bill proposes to deliver a range of critical and fundamental reforms to our justice system and I am keen to begin the Assembly stages as soon as is possible.

Hydebank Wood: CJI Report

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Justice when he expects to receive a positive report into the prisons at Hydebank Wood.

(AQO 4832/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reforming our prisons is a key priority, as with any change of this scale it is challenging and implementing the necessary reforms will take time. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015.

I acknowledge that the recent Criminal Justice Inspection reports highlight a number of issues where improvement is required. I am encouraged that since this inspection there have been major changes.

A new management team is in place at Hydebank Wood, supported by a new Director of Offender Policy and Operations and a Director of Rehabilitation. An action plan has been developed to address the major issues of concern found by the Inspectorate.

I have consistently acknowledged that the co-location of female prisoners and young offenders on the same site is far from ideal, and I am committed to providing a new separate facility for women offenders. I will continue to work to ensure that such a facility is established as soon as is practicable.

Policing: Young People

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Justice what work is being undertaken to address the perceptions of policing young people, especially in areas deemed to be disadvantaged.

(AQO 4833/11-15)

Mr Ford: At just under 80%, the latest figures show that overall confidence in the PSNI and in policing remains at a level comparable to its high point in 2011/12. However, the PSNI have acknowledged that the flags protest and disorder on our streets have impacted on perceptions of policing, not least among young people, within some communities.

Following publication, in 2011, of the Northern Ireland Policing Board's thematic review of policing with children and young people, the Board's Youth Advisory Panel has been facilitating engagement with young people aimed at developing an understanding of their needs and concerns.

A number of work-streams are currently being progressed by the Youth Advisory Panel, including a research initiative looking at the styles of policing used by Neighbourhood, Response and TSG officers when policing young people. A report on the research, which gathered the views of police officers in North Belfast, was recently approved by the Board's Partnership Committee and will be brought before the Board next month.

The Youth Advisory Panel is also developing an Emergency Services Youth Apprenticeship/engagement Scheme in partnership with the PSNI; other emergency services; academic institutions and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The purpose of this scheme, which is focused on 16-25 year olds who are not in employment, education or training, is to build confidence in the emergency services and other public sector bodies.

My Department is also taking forward recommendations made in the Review of Youth Justice report, published in 2011, including an initiative aimed at enabling young people to raise concerns about local policing without the need to invoke the full weight of the current system via the Police Ombudsman's Office.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) also continue to work with young people, including creating opportunities for them to actively participate in events designed to discuss policing and community safety issues with a wide range of key stakeholders, including PSNI members.

PSNI: Agency Workers

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Justice to outline any communication and meetings between his Department and the PSNI regarding the expiry of the contract with Grafton Recruitment for PSNI agency workers.

(AQO 4834/11-15)

Mr Ford: The expiry of the contract with Grafton Recruitment for PSNI agency workers was discussed at the Police Resource Group (PRG) meeting held in May 2013. This group is chaired by the Department's Director of Safer Communities and is held every two to three months. The group consists of senior staff of the Policing Board, PSNI and the DOJ.

It was agreed at the PRG meeting that PSNI would not proceed with a new business case until after the issue of the PAC report so that any recommendations made in the report are considered and, if appropriate, included within a new contract.

The PSNI's existing contract expires in December 2013. The PAC report on this issue is expected to be published at the end of November 2013, at the earliest. It is therefore highly likely that a further Direct Award Contract will be required before the end of this calendar year.

Hydebank Wood: Ash House

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Justice, given the recent report by Criminal Justice Inspection into conditions for women prisoners at Ash House, Hydebank Wood, what plans he has to expedite the closure of this prison and the movement of female prisoners into a new facility.

(AQO 4835/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reforming our prisons is a key priority, as with any change of this scale it is challenging and implementing the necessary reforms will take time. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015.

I acknowledge that the recent Criminal Justice Inspection reports highlight a number of issues where improvement is required. I am encouraged that since this inspection there have been major changes.

A new management team is in place at Hydebank Wood, supported by a new Director of Offender Policy and Operations and a Director of Rehabilitation. An action plan has been developed to address the major issues of concern found by the Inspectorate.

I have consistently acknowledged that the co-location of female prisoners and young offenders on the same site is far from ideal, and I am committed to providing a new separate facility for women offenders. I will continue to work to ensure that such a facility is established as soon as is practicable.

Hydebank Wood: CJI Report

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice for an assurance that the findings in the recent Criminal Justice Inspection report on Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre will be acted upon without delay.

(AQO 4836/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reforming our prisons is a key priority, as with any change of this scale it is challenging and implementing the necessary reforms will take time. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015.

I acknowledge that the recent Criminal Justice Inspection reports highlight a number of issues where improvement is required. I am encouraged that since this inspection there have been major changes.

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Hydebank Wood: Victimisation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Justice, given the recent report by Criminal Justice Inspection into the Young Offenders Centre at Hydebank Wood, which highlighted the issue of victimization of inmates by staff and other prisoners, what plans he has to address this problem.

(AQO 4829/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reforming our prisons is a key priority, as with any change of this scale it is challenging and implementing the necessary reforms will take time. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently halfway through a programme of reform that will run until April 2015.

I acknowledge that the recent Criminal Justice Inspection reports highlight a number of issues where improvement is required. I am encouraged that since this inspection there have been major changes.

A new management team is in place at Hydebank Wood, supported by a new Director of Offender Policy and Operations and a Director of Rehabilitation. An action plan has been developed to address the major issues of concern found by the Inspectorate.

I have consistently acknowledged that the co-location of female prisoners and young offenders on the same site is far from ideal, and I am committed to providing a new separate facility for women offenders. I will continue to work to ensure that such a facility is established as soon as is practicable.

Department for Regional Development

Cycling Infrastructure

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has invested in cycling infrastructure in (i) Moyle; (ii) Ballymena; and (iii) Ballymoney in each of the last five years.

(AQW 25261/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would advise the Member that I have recently instructed my officials to give increased and focused priority to the needs of cyclists, to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport. To that end, I am establishing a new cycling unit to ensure cycling issues and initiatives are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner across my Department, in partnership with local government, voluntary bodies, public transport operators and the health and education sectors.

With regard to my Department's investment in infrastructure, details of the amounts spent in each of the last five financial years in the Moyle, Ballymoney and Ballymena Council areas are set out in the table below:

Year	Moyle	Ballymoney	Ballymena
2008/09	-	£90,000	£57,000 *
2009/10	£800	£163,000	£45,000
2010/11	-	-	-
2011/12	-	-	-
2012/13	-	£39,000	-

This expenditure included a range of schemes including National Cycle Network (NCN) Route signage, Safe Routes to Schools, developing NCN routes and providing local cycling routes.

* includes DRD contribution towards a £217,000 scheme jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (75%) and Roads Service (25%).

Winter Conditions

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the arrangements his Department is making to deal with severe winter weather.

(AQW 26033/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is well prepared for the coming winter. Staffing arrangements are being finalised, pre-season checks on winter service equipment are complete and salt stocks have been replenished. From the end of October, Roads Service will have over 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads. Contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

Following the two snow events last winter, I commissioned an independent review of the performance of Roads Service over the period. The National Winter Service Research Group carried out a comprehensive review, examining every aspect of the winter service programme. The outcome of the review was positive and concluded our winter service policies were well-considered and consistent. I have placed a copy of the review in the Assembly Library.

One of the key recommendations from the review was that the winter service fleet replacement programme continues to be prioritised in order to reduce the unreliability of gritters and other equipment. I am committed to investing in the winter service fleet and to that end, will continue to seek funding to ensure the fleet we have is fit for purpose and capable of dealing with the long winter period. I hope Members will support bids for this additional funding.

A further recommendation highlighted the need for consistency of service in relation to the salting of footways. My Department has arrangements with 24 of the 26 District Councils to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow. I have written to the Chief Executives of the remaining two councils to encourage them to come on board.

Northern Ireland Water will continue with the range of measures within the Winter Contingency Plan, in order that it can be well placed to respond to anticipated increases in burst mains, corresponding loss of supply and increased demand in the weeks ahead and the remainder of the winter.

Coleraine: Car Parking

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will review the supply and demand of car parking provision in Coleraine over the next eighteen months.

(AQW 26232/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Supply and demand for parking is regularly reviewed and this process will continue over the next eighteen months. Should you have any specific concerns regarding parking issues in Coleraine, please contact local Roads Service officials who will be happy to discuss your concerns in more detail.

Metro: Passengers on Saturdays

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average number of passengers using the Metro Service on a Saturday and for his assessment of passenger number trends.

(AQW 26290/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised that the average number of Saturday passenger journeys for the past two years is as follows:

Year	Passenger Journeys
2012/13	54,720
2011/12	51,974

Translink

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many accountability meetings he has chaired with Translink directors; and to detail the dates the meetings took place.

(AQW 26392/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have chaired 3 formal accountability meetings with some of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company directors since taking up my Ministerial post in 2011. The meetings took place on the following dates:-

- 7 December 2011;
- 20 June 2012; and
- 20 June 2013.

In addition to these formal meetings I have of course had regular meetings with Translink's Group Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer to discuss a wide range of issues including the Translink Corporate Plan; funding pressures; Belfast Transport Hub; NITHC Assets to name but a few. My officials also brief me on a regular basis regarding Translink matters.

Cycling Greenway: Holywood to Belfast

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department is giving to developing and funding a cycling greenway between Holywood and Belfast city centre.

(AQW 26419/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I understand Sustrans is developing a proposal for a cycling and walking path along this route. Sustrans has indicated it will be bringing forward details of this proposal to the next meeting of the Active Travel Forum. My Department and other relevant bodies represented on the Forum can advise on the appropriate mechanisms to review and take forward the proposal.

Cycle Lanes: Illegal Parking

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of fines which have been issued to people illegally parked in cycle lanes, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 26420/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued to vehicles parked on mandatory cycle lanes, in each of the last twelve months, are provided in the table below:

Month	PCNs
September 2013	2

Month	PCNs
August 2013	0
July 2013	1
June 2013	0
May 2013	0
April 2013	1
March 2013	1
February 2013	2
January 2013	0
December 2012	1
November 2012	0
October 2012	2

During the same period, 4,621 PCNs were issued for contraventions on clearways and 626 on bus lanes.

Cycling and Walking Greenway: Holywood to Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the proposal for a cycling and walking greenway from Victoria Park via Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, the railway line to George Best City Airport and Belfast Harbour Estate to link with the North Down Coastal Path at Holywood.

(AQW 26463/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my response to his recent related question AQW 25539/11-15, when I advised that cycling facilities already exist along the A2 between Victoria Park and Holywood.

I understand Sustrans is developing a proposal for a cycling and walking path along this route. Sustrans has indicated it will be bringing forward details of this proposal to the next meeting of the Active Travel Forum. This will provide an opportunity for my Department and other relevant bodies represented on the Forum to consider the proposal.

Antrim: Car Park Revenue

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue has been collected from each pay and display car park in Antrim, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26499/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently two pay and display car parks in Antrim. The income generated from these car parks in the past five years is as follows:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Central	£145,090	£142,846	£128,539	£133,515	£133,576
Railway Street	£40,694	£39,275	£40,435	£41,819	£46,996

Cycles on Trains

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to increase the capacity of railways to enable cyclists to bring their bicycles onto trains before 9.30am.

(AQW 26579/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Railways advise that virtually all trains operating into Belfast each morning are carrying large numbers of standing passengers in addition to all seats being occupied and passenger numbers are continuing to grow.

NI Railways are now assessing future additional rolling stock requirements however it is expected that any future capacity provision will continue to have to be reserved for passengers rather than passengers and cycles prior to 09:30. Any economic appraisal for new rolling stock has to meet a rigorous set of economic and financial/cost criteria before funding is considered for new train capacity.

Where space exists on more lightly loaded trains leaving Belfast in the morning, cycles are permitted and NI Railways expect to continue this practice going forward.

Parking Tickets: Issued and Overturned

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking tickets have been (i) issued; and (ii) subsequently overturned on appeal, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26592/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The numbers of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued and subsequently cancelled are set out in the table below.

Year	PCNs Issued	PCNs Cancelled
2010/11	118,478	10,608
2011/12	124,864	11,424
2012/13	108,354	11,040

The cancellation of a PCN does not necessarily mean it was incorrectly issued. The most common reasons for cancellation are when a copy of a valid blue badge is subsequently provided or when a valid Pay and Display ticket is subsequently provided.

Road Projects: County Londonderry and County Tyrone

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent on road projects in (i) County Londonderry; and (ii) County Tyrone, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 26616/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not record details of its spend on a county basis.

Winter Conditions

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development what preparations have been made for potential difficult winter conditions in relation to keeping roads open.

(AQW 26634/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is prepared for the coming winter. Staffing arrangements are being finalised, pre-season checks on winter service equipment are complete and salt stocks have been replenished.

From the end of October, my Department will have over 300 people on standby, ready to salt main roads. Contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

Following the two snow events last winter, I commissioned an independent review of the performance of the Department over the period. The National Winter Service Research Group carried out a comprehensive review, examining every aspect of the winter service programme. The outcome of the review was positive and concluded that our winter service policies were well-considered and consistent.

One of the key recommendations from the review was that the winter service fleet replacement programme continues to be prioritised in order to reduce the unreliability of gritters and other equipment. I am committed to investing in the winter service fleet and to that end, will continue to seek funding to ensure the fleet we have is capable of dealing with the long winter period. I hope Members will support bids for this additional funding.

A further recommendation highlighted the need for consistency of service in relation to the salting of footways. My Department has agreements with 24 of the 26 District Councils to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow. I propose to write to the Chief Executives of the remaining two councils to encourage them to come on board.

Northern Ireland Water will continue with the range of measures within the Winter Contingency Plan, in order that it can be well placed to respond to any burst mains, loss of supply or increased demand in the weeks ahead and the remainder of the winter.

Roads: Acoustic Tests

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Regional Development whether acoustic tests are completed in rural areas following road resurfacing, and if so, to detail the number of completed tests in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 26639/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not complete acoustic tests in rural areas following road resurfacing as there is currently no requirement, to undertake any form of acoustic test, as re-surfacing does not in itself cause a change in noise levels.

E-charging: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to e-charging points, to detail (i) the location of each point in South Antrim; and (ii) the number of times each point has been used since they were installed.

(AQW 26723/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department has provided electric vehicle charging points in various locations across South Antrim. All installations were completed by the 31st of June 2013. The table below details the locations of these charge points.

Data is provided to the Department on a quarterly basis and the table below represents charge point usage from the date of commissioning up until the 22nd of August (approx 7 weeks).

Charge Point Location	Charge Point ID	Charger Ref	Approx. Date of Installation	Total Charging Events to 22nd August 2013
Antrim	Antrim Forum Leisure Complex	SC94	June 2013	1
Antrim	Antrim NIR Park and Ride	SC107	June 2013	0
Antrim	DRD Car Park, Castle St, Antrim	SC46	June 2013	0
Antrim	DRD Car Park, Dublin Road	SC61	June 2013	2
Antrim	Dunsilly Park and Ride	SC99	June 2013	1
Templepatrick	Templepatrick Park and Ride	SC144	June 2013	0
Antrim	Junction 1 Shopping Centre	SC56	June 2013	Data not available
Randalstown	Portglenone Road	SC120	June 2013	0
Antrim	Texaco Garage Junction 1 International Outlet	RC07	June 2013	Data not available
Templepatrick	Hilton Hotel	SC114	June 2013	1
Crumlin	Community Centre	SC115	June 2013	0
Antrim	Junction 1 Shopping Centre	SC56	June 2013	16
Ballyclare	DRD Car Park Harrier Way	SC98	June 2013	2
Ballyclare	Sixmile Leisure Centre	SC43	June 2013	2
Carnmoney	DRD Car Park Beverley Road	SC48	June 2013	1
Glengormley	DRD Car Park Farmley Road	SC54	June 2013	Data not available
Newtownabbey	Jordanstown Park and Ride Lynda Avenue	SC141	June 2013	14
Newtownabbey	Mossley West Park and Ride	SC147	June 2013	1
Newtownabbey	The Valley Leisure Centre	SC44	June 2013	2
Toomebridge	Park and Ride Toome Bypass	SC145	June 2013	Data not available

Water Meters: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many water meters incurred an installation charge in North Down, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26812/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that customers are not charged for water meter installations and consequently there have been no customers charged for meter installation in North Down during any of the past 5 years. Charges are not applied for water meter installation because the meters are owned by and remain the responsibility of NIW.

Water Meters: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many water meters have been installed in North Down, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26814/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the number of water meters installed in North Down, in each of the last five financial years, is as detailed in the table below. These figures have been determined by reference to the property addresses and post codes within the North Down constituency and they include all water meter installations irrespective of reason (newly connected properties, existing properties not previously metered, and renewal of existing meters).

Financial Year	Number of Meters Installed
2008/09	692
2009/10	210
2010/11	313
2011/12	249
2012/13	195

Cycle to Work

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the Cycle to Work Scheme (i) for his assessment of the level of bureaucracy involved when employers join the scheme; (ii) whether he considers this appropriate for small businesses and organisations; and (iii) what action he will take to minimise the present level of bureaucracy and widen the appeal of the scheme. (AQW 26817/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) The Cycle to Work Scheme is an initiative introduced by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in 1999 to support the promotion of sustainable travel to the workplace. In 2009/2010 my Department carried out a limited internal Pilot Study of the scheme to evaluate how it could be introduced across the NI Civil Service (NICS). The pilot study identified some initial learning points which were passed to the Department of Finance And Personnel prior to the scheme being introduced across all of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, in June 2012. I now believe the scheme is operating well with 171 members of staff in my Department participating in the scheme out of a total of 1156 across the wider NICS (figures at 19 September 2013).
- (ii) My Departments Travelwise Team provides information and advice to employers in regard to the development and implementation of Workplace Travel Plans (WTP's) to encourage sustainable travel and the Cycle to Work Scheme is a key strand of these plans. It also provides information to employers on the options available in regard to the Cycle to Work Scheme which employers may find useful. This information is aimed at assisting in helping to reduce levels of bureaucracy encountered by employers. I am not aware of any significant negative feedback on this issue.
- (iii) My Department does not have a role in relation to the operation of the HMRC Scheme but we will however continue to encourage any employers who may have concerns above the perceived level of bureaucracy to raise those concerns with HMRC. My officials will also continue to make employers aware of the scheme as part of the promotion of sustainable travel and the benefits the scheme can have for employers and their employees.

Travel Survey

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25776/11-15, whether he will consider reviewing the data measured by the Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI). (AQW 26820/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As a National Statistics Publication, the Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) is reviewed annually and a comprehensive review took place between 2010 and 2011 which took the form of a number of user consultations. As a result of that review, a number of questions, including a set of cycling specific questions, were added into the 2012 TSNI for the first time. However, as the survey requires 3 years of data, results will not be available until the 2012-2014 In-depth TSNI report is published in December 2015.

For details of the questions used in 2012, please see the TSNI 2010-2012 Technical Report:
http://www.drdni.gov.uk/tsni_technical_report_2010-2012.pdf.

Residential Developments: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the residential developments in South Antrim that have a road surety bond; and how long each bond has been outstanding. (AQW 26841/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the residential developments in South Antrim that have a road surety bond and time outstanding (calculated to the nearest year) are as follows:

Site Description	Date Bonded	Time Outstanding (Years)
Toberdowney, Ballynure	05/Mar/1997	16
Arthur Crescent, Carnmoney	03/Jun/1998	15
Arthur Crescent, Carnmoney	03/Jun/1998	15

Site Description	Date Bonded	Time Outstanding (Years)
Arthur Crescent, Carnmoney	18/Jan/1999	14
Forthaven, The Longshot, Ballyrobert, Ballyclare	15/Jul/2009	4
Russell Court, Ballyclare	04/Oct/2010	3
Orwood Mews, Newtownabbey	08/Jun/1998	15
Glen Mews, Ballyclare	07/Mar/2000	13
Ellisfield Mews, Straid	10/Nov/2003	10
Carnbank, Templepatrick	19/May/2003	10
Exchange Avenue, Station Road, Doagh	20/May/2010	3
Ballyhamage, Burn Road, Doagh	10/Nov/2003	10
Ross's Avenue, Ballyclare	05/May/2009	4
Mayfield Village, Mallusk	08/Oct/2004	9
Richmond Park, Ballyclare	27/Apr/2004	9
Richmond Park, Ballyclare	17/Oct/2006	7
Richmond Park, Ballyclare	17/Oct/2006	7
Richmond Park, Ballyclare	08/Nov/2006	7
Mayfield Village, Mallusk	30/Jan/2006	7
Ballyduff Road, Newtownabbey	20/Jun/2005	8
Rogan Wood, Antrim Road, Newtownabbey	16/Nov/2006	7
Mayfield Village, Mallusk	27/Mar/2006	7
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	10/Dec/2008	5
Ballycorr Road, Ballyclare	08/Jan/2008	5
Hydepark Road, Newtownabbey	01/Jun/2007	6
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	11/Dec/2006	7
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	19/Dec/2006	7
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	19/Dec/2006	7
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	10/Dec/2008	5
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	12/Dec/2012	1
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	10/Dec/2008	5
Main Street, Ballynure	10/Oct/2012	1
Main Street, Ballynure	10/Oct/2012	1
Ballyeaston Road, Ballyclare	09/Jan/2008	5
Ballyeaston Road, Ballyclare	09/Jan/2008	5
Doagh Road, Ballyclare	28/Sep/2012	1
Doagh Road, Ballyclare	11/Sep/2012	1
Ballyrobert Road, Newtownabbey	15/Jun/2012	1
Doagh Road, Ballyclare	15/Sep/2008	5
Doagh Road, Ballyclare	04/Apr/2008	5
Doagh Road, Ballyclare	20/Aug/2009	4
Ballylagan Road, Straid	17/Aug/2009	4
Ballyrobert Road, Ballyrobert	12/Sep/2011	2

Site Description	Date Bonded	Time Outstanding (Years)
Aspen View, Doagh Road, Newtownabbey	04/Apr/2011	2
Clarke Lodge Mews, Templepatrick	01/Mar/2012	1
Green Acres, Glebe Road, Newtownabbey	26/Oct/2012	1
Rashee Road, Ballyclare	12/Aug/2010	3
Readers Park, Rashee Road, Ballyclare	01/Aug/2011	2
Readers Drive, Rashee Road, Ballyclare	01/Aug/2011	2
Knockview Road, Newtownabbey	10/Jun/2011	2
Ballylagan Road, Straid	05/May/2011	2
Mayfield Village, Hyde Park Road, Mallusk	18/Oct/2010	3
Ballyearl Drive, New Mossley, Newtownabbey	20/Oct/2011	2
Abercorn Drive, Ballyclare	09/Feb/2011	2
Rashee Drive, Ballyclare	14/Jun/2011	2
Rashee Drive, Ballyclare	14/Jun/2011	2
Beechwood Avenue, Carnmoney	01/Nov/2012	1
Beechwood Avenue, Carnmoney	07/Nov/2012	1
Forthaven, The Longshot, Ballyclare	10/May/2002	11
Forthaven, The Longshot, Ballyclare	22/Sep/2003	10
Millmount, Randalstown	06/Nov/2000	13
Millmount, Randalstown	13/Dec/2000	13
Millmount, Randalstown	22/Sep/2003	10
Castle Road, Randalstown	06/Jun/2002	11
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Jan/2006	7
Millhouse Village, Antrim	06/Feb/2006	7
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Dec/2005	8
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Jan/2006	7
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Jan/2006	7
Millhouse Village, Antrim	22/Sep/2006	7
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Dec/2005	8
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Dec/2005	8
Millhouse Village, Antrim	18/May/2006	7
Millhouse Village, Antrim	22/Feb/2007	6
Millhouse Village, Antrim	17/May/2007	6
Millhouse Village, Antrim	22/Mar/2007	6
Millhouse Village, Antrim	22/Mar/2007	6
Millhouse Village, Antrim	30/Jan/2007	6
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Jun/2008	5
Millhouse Village, Antrim	12/Sep/2008	5
Millhouse Village, Antrim	13/Nov/2009	4
Millhouse Village, Antrim	21/Oct/2009	4
Millhouse Village, Antrim	15/Jul/2009	4

Site Description	Date Bonded	Time Outstanding (Years)
Millhouse Village, Antrim	22/Mar/2010	3
Millhouse Village, Antrim	10/Dec/2010	3
Millhouse Village, Antrim	02/Aug/2011	2
Millhouse Village, Antrim	29/Apr/2013	0
Birchdale, Randalstown	14/Mar/2003	10
Carnbeg, Antrim	18/Apr/2008	5
Carnbeg, Antrim	09/Jan/2012	1
Carnbeg, Kilbegs Road, Antrim	06/Feb/2013	0
Castle Avenue, Randalstown	07/Dec/2004	9
Bush Manor, Antrim	07/Jul/2008	5
Bush Manor, Antrim	11/Jul/2008	5
Bushforde Manor, Antrim	09/Jan/2012	1
Bushforde Manor, Antrim	26/Oct/2012	1
Maple Park, Lurgan Road, Crumlin	04/May/2005	8
The Cedars, Cunningham Way, Antrim	06/Jun/2005	8
The Cedars, Cunningham Way, Antrim	28/Aug/2007	6
Bleach Green, Dunadry	24/Mar/2005	8
Packenham Court, Crumlin	20/Apr/2007	6
Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim	22/Jun/2007	6
Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim	28/Aug/2007	6
Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim	22/Jun/2007	6
Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim	22/Jun/2007	6
Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim	28/Aug/2007	6
Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim	15/Jun/2007	6
Bush Road, Antrim	05/Sep/2007	6
Belfast Road, Antrim	20/Nov/2012	1
Red Row, Toomebridge	12/Mar/2010	3
Red Row, Toomebridge	02/Feb/2012	1
Shanes Street, Randalstown	18/Mar/2011	2
Nutts Corner Road, Crumlin	14/Feb/2013	0
Portmore Hall, Crumlin	18/Jun/2010	3
Portmore Hall, Crumlin	04/Sep/2013	0
Steeple Road, Antrim	14/Mar/2011	2
Steeple Road, Antrim	18/Mar/2011	2
Ferrard Meadow, Antrim	05/Apr/2011	2
Cunningham Way, Antrim	11/Aug/2011	2
Grange Lodge, Antrim	05/Aug/2011	2
Grange Lodge, Antrim	05/Aug/2011	2
Grange Lodge, Antrim	29/Oct/2012	1
Grange Lodge, Antrim	05/Aug/2011	2

Site Description	Date Bonded	Time Outstanding (Years)
Tresna Park, Randalstown	09/Jan/2012	1
Ballydonagh Road, Crumlin	12/Aug/2013	0
Ballydonagh Road, Crumlin	12/Aug/2013	0
Main Street, Crumlin	13/Feb/2013	0
Main Street, Crumlin	08/Mar/2013	0
Main Street, Parkgate	24/Jul/2013	0

Railways: Antrim Station

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how the passenger numbers using Antrim Station compares for (i) the year ending 31 March 2013 with the year ending 31 March 2011; and (ii) the first six months of this financial year compares with the same period last year.

(AQW 26891/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following passenger flows were recorded for Antrim Station:

(i)

2010/11	2012/13	% Difference
278,711	302,383*	+ 8.5

* Based on 52 weeks

(ii)

2012/13 April-September	2013/14 April- September	% Difference
146,287	201,622	+ 37.8

Railways: Coleraine to Belfast

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how the passenger numbers using the Coleraine to Belfast line compares for (i) the year end 31 March 2013 with the year ending 31 March 2011; and (ii) the first six months of this financial year compares with the same period last year.

(AQW 26892/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following passenger journeys were recorded on the Coleraine to Belfast corridor:

(i)

2010/11	2012/13	% Difference
1,189,863	1,302,687 *	+ 9.5

* Based on 52 weeks

(ii)

2012/13 April-September	2013/14 April- September	% Difference
644,118	861,547	+33.8

Ballymoney Train Station

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the passenger numbers using Ballymoney Station in the year ending 31 March 2013; and how that compares with the year ending 31 March 2011.

(AQW 26893/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following passenger flows were recorded for Ballymoney Station:

2010/11	2012/13	% Difference
269,961	318,678*	+ 18.0

* Based on 52 weeks

Winter Conditions

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development what preparations have been made for potentially difficult winter conditions in relation to keeping roads open.

(AQW 26912/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is well prepared for the coming winter. Staffing arrangements are being finalised, pre-season checks on winter service equipment are complete and salt stocks have been replenished. From the end of October, Roads Service will have over 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads. Contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

Following the two snow events last winter, I commissioned an independent review of the performance of Roads Service over the period. The National Winter Service Research Group carried out a comprehensive review, examining every aspect of the winter service programme. The outcome of the review was positive and concluded our winter service policies were well-considered and consistent. I have placed a copy of the review in the Assembly Library.

One of the key recommendations from the review was that the winter service fleet replacement programme continues to be prioritised in order to reduce the unreliability of gritters and other equipment. I am committed to investing in the winter service fleet and to that end, will continue to seek funding to ensure the fleet we have is fit for purpose and capable of dealing with the long winter period. I hope Members will support bids for this additional funding.

A further recommendation highlighted the need for consistency of service in relation to the salting of footways. My Department has arrangements with 24 of the 26 District Councils to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow. I have written to the Chief Executives of the remaining two councils to encourage them to come on board.

Cycling

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what process is in place to monitor the number of people that use cycling as a means of transport; and to detail the baseline figure used to ascertain changes in the number people using cycling as a means of transport.

(AQW 26934/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) is the only source of data that records how and why people travel in Northern Ireland. A range of cycling specific information is recorded, including the average distance travelled per person per year by bicycle, the number of cycling journeys taken per person per year and the average journey length for bicycle journeys.

More information on the TSNI can be found at:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/statistics/stats-categories/northern_ireland_travel_survey.htm.

The baseline will vary according to the strategy or target being monitored.

Traffic Wardens

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many traffic wardens are employed.

(AQW 26938/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Traffic Attendants are employed by NSL, which is a private company. NSL employs a total of 165 Traffic Attendants for deployment across Northern Ireland.

Parking on Footpaths

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how Roads Service deal with cars parked on footpaths.

(AQW 26939/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Parking restrictions, such as yellow lines, which are marked on the carriageway also apply to the footway and a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) can be issued to a vehicle which is parked on the footway, in breach of the restriction. A PCN can also be issued to a vehicle which is parked on the footway in breach of clearway restrictions.

The PSNI can also take action when a vehicle is parked on the footway and causing an obstruction, where no parking restrictions apply.

Penalty Charge Notices: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Penalty Charge Notices have been issued in North Down, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 26940/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued in North Down, in each of the last five years, are provided in the table below:

Year	PCNs Issued
2012/13	4,506
2011/12	5,065
2010/11	5,015
2009/10	4,873
2008/09	5,502

Clamping

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's position on clamping vehicles.
(AQW 26941/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently uses vehicle clamping only in relation to the recovery of debt arising from unpaid Penalty Charge Notices.

Road Junctions: Double Yellow Lines

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's position on painting double yellow lines on the corner of a road junction.
(AQW 26942/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Corner restrictions are provided primarily for road safety reasons and, in general, parking within 15m of a junction is prohibited unless within a lay-by in specified circumstances, or in a designated parking area.

Where a corner is not marked with a double yellow line, the prohibition can only be enforced by the police. However, where the prohibition is marked with a double yellow line, it can also be enforced by Traffic Attendants.

In town and city centres and busier urban areas, most corners are already marked to facilitate enforcement by traffic attendants. Beyond this, corners are normally only marked where regular and sustained parking is impeding traffic progression.

Road Surety Bonds: East Antrim

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the value of each Road Surety Bond in East Antrim; and (ii) who receives any interest accrued from the money deposited.
(AQW 26961/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the initial value and current value of each road bond in East Antrim. The majority of bonds listed are surety bonds with no interest payable. Cash bonds, where interest would be payable, are in bold upper case. Interest is calculated at 0.5% below the Bank of England base rate (currently 0.5%) therefore the interest charge is zero. Interest is paid to the developer who deposited the cash bond. In the instances where the developer is no longer trading, interest is paid to the developer's representative or administrator.

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)	Initial Bond Value	Current Bond value
Beechwood Avenue, Newtownabbey	01/Nov/2012	1	£22,800.00	£22,800.00
Beechwood Avenue, Newtownabbey	07/Nov/2012	1	£40,000.00	£40,000.00
Brackenridge, Sloefield Road, Carrickfergus	21/Sep/2001	12	£20,500.00	£2,050.00
Bridewell Drive, Carrickfergus	29/Oct/2004	9	£28,700.00	£28,700.00
Brooklands Gardens, Carrickfergus	22/Mar/2005	8	£30,300.00	£3,030.00
Cambridge Close, Carrickfergus	27/Aug/1996	17	£69,700.00	£69,700.00
Circular Road, Jordanstown	10/Aug/2006	7	£4,000.00	£4,000.00
Craiglands, Carrickfergus	12/Mar/1997	16	£30,500.00	£9,150.00
Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus	04/Apr/2012	1	£67,200.00	£67,200.00
Farm Lodge Park, Greenisland	02/Apr/2012	1	£38,500.00	£38,500.00
Farm Lodge, Greenisland	04/Jul/2000	13	£146,000.00	£43,800.00
Farm Lodge, Greenisland	06/Feb/2006	7	£108,300.00	£54,150.00

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)	Initial Bond Value	Current Bond value
Glenavna, Shore Road, Newtownabbey	10/Sep/2009	4	£73,400.00	£36,700.00
Glenavna, Shore Road, Newtownabbey	06/Sep/2013	0	£21,200.00	£21,200.00
Glenisland Terrace, Greenisland	31/Oct/2011	2	£41,600.00	£41,600.00
Glenview Park, Newtownabbey	09/Oct/2002	11	£26,750.00	£13,375.00
Glenview Park, Newtownabbey	19/Jan/2009	4	£35,000.00	£17,500.00
Glenville Road, Newtownabbey	14/May/2008	5	£20,000.00	£20,000.00
Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey	14/Jun/2010	3	£29,000.00	£29,000.00
Larne Road, Carrickfergus	07/Sep/2009	4	£69,050.00	£69,050.00
Larne Road, Carrickfergus	17/Dec/2009	4	£31,700.00	£15,850.00
Longpark, Farm Lodge, Greenisland	06/Feb/2006	7	£109,800.00	£54,900.00
Loughshore Courtyard, Shore Road, Jordanstown	04/Jan/2011	2	£43,250.00	£4,325.00
Meadowbank Farm, Jordanstown	09/Mar/2007	6	£52,750.00	£52,750.00
Mountpleasant View, Mountpleasant Road, Jordanstown	14/Jun/2010	3	£33,200.00	£16,600.00
North Lodge Court, Carrickfergus	11/Mar/2002	11	£38,700.00	£3,870.00
Old Shore Court, Carrickfergus	22/Aug/2005	8	£90,650.00	£45,325.00
Rhanbuoy Close, Carrickfergus	21/Feb/2013	0	£22,250.00	£11,125.00
Riverbrook, Brooklands Drive, Carrickfergus	10/Jun/1998	15	£37,200.00	£37,200.00
Riverforde, Slaughterford Road, Whitehead	02/Mar/2005	8	£96,850.00	£96,850.00
Riverforde, Slaughterford Road, Whitehead	02/Aug/2006	7	£224,850.00	£224,850.00
Shorelands, Shore Road, Greenisland	20/Jan/2011	2	£234,400.00	£117,200.00
Shorelands, Shore Road, Greenisland	25/Jan/2013	0	£23,400.00	£23,400.00
The Cairns, Upper Station Road, Greenisland	13/Jan/2012	1	£69,450.00	£34,725.00
Thralcot Link, Carrickfergus	22/Feb/2013	0	£14,200.00	£14,200.00
Trailcock Road, Carrickfergus	02/Apr/2012	1	£42,400.00	£42,400.00
Trailcock Road, Carrickfergus	15/May/2013	0	£30,100.00	£30,100.00
Tudor Road, Carrickfergus	22/Jan/2013	0	£43,200.00	£43,200.00
Upper Road, Greenisland	13/Nov/2007	6	£35,450.00	£17,725.00
Windmill Park, Carrickfergus	23/Nov/2011	2	£42,300.00	£4,230.00
Woodlawn, Carrickfergus	11/Sep/1987	26	£26,000.00	£7,800.00
Whinfield, Larne	27/Apr/1990	23	£15,800.00	£15,800.00
Whinfield, Larne	04/Feb/1997	16	£43,900.00	£21,950.00
Inver Heights, Larne	29/Oct/1991	22	£12,360.00	£3,708.00
Inver Heights, Larne	18/Sep/1992	21	£27,340.00	£8,202.00
Oakdene, Larne	03/Sep/2007	6	£3,950.00	£3,950.00
Ballyloran Manor, Larne	11/Sep/2000	13	£99,600.00	£29,880.00
Hampton Manor, Larne	04/Oct/2002	11	£24,700.00	£7,410.00
Lindara, Larne	14/Dec/2001	12	£106,600.00	£53,300.00
Lindara, Larne	14/Aug/2003	10	£88,200.00	£44,100.00
Lindara, Larne	17/Nov/2004	9	£213,100.00	£106,550.00

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)	Initial Bond Value	Current Bond value
Lindara, Larne	27/Apr/2006	7	£105,950.00	£105,950.00
Lindara, Larne	27/Apr/2006	7	£61,950.00	£61,950.00
Lindara, Larne	27/Apr/2006	7	£63,650.00	£63,650.00
Lindara, Larne	24/Jan/2007	6	£110,350.00	£110,350.00
Lindara, Larne	28/Nov/2007	6	£141,700.00	£141,700.00
Lindara, Larne	28/Nov/2007	6	£96,900.00	£96,900.00
Lindara, Larne	28/Nov/2007	6	£105,000.00	£105,000.00
Lindara, Larne	12/Apr/2002	11	£10,900.00	£10,900.00
Mullaghboy Heights, Islandmagee	03/Oct/2007	6	£45,200.00	£22,600.00
Mullaghboy Heights, Islandmagee	27/Jan/2010	3	£34,500.00	£17,250.00
Drumahoe Manor, Larne	29/Apr/2004	9	£111,400.00	£111,400.00
Drumahoe Manor, Larne	10/Aug/2006	7	£50,300.00	£50,300.00
Leafield, Ballycarry	14/Aug/2006	7	£124,900.00	£12,490.00
Leafield, Ballycarry	12/Aug/2010	3	£28,300.00	£8,490.00
Bayfields, Carnlough	02/Nov/2006	7	£52,150.00	£5,215.00
Bayfields, Carnlough	10/May/2007	6	£85,100.00	£85,100.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	08/Sep/2005	8	£65,250.00	£32,625.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	27/Sep/2005	8	£69,600.00	£34,800.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	08/Sep/2005	8	£59,250.00	£29,625.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	08/Sep/2005	8	£68,000.00	£34,000.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	22/Sep/2005	8	£44,450.00	£22,225.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	22/Sep/2005	8	£46,900.00	£23,450.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	22/Sep/2005	8	£34,100.00	£17,050.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	10/Jan/2006	7	£40,000.00	£20,000.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	10/Jan/2006	7	£53,200.00	£26,600.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	10/Jan/2006	7	£50,250.00	£25,125.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	10/Jan/2006	7	£54,400.00	£27,200.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	17/Oct/2006	7	£56,200.00	£28,100.00
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	16/Jan/2007	6	£21,400.00	£10,700.00
Barklie Grove, Larne	17/Oct/2011	2	£22,500.00	£2,250.00
The Hamptons, Larne	02/Nov/2006	7	£267,250.00	£26,725.00
The Hamptons, Larne	02/Nov/2006	7	£42,700.00	£21,350.00
The Hamptons, Larne	02/Nov/2006	7	£24,600.00	£12,300.00
The Hamptons, Larne	23/Jan/2007	6	£135,750.00	£67,875.00
Lislaynan, Ballycarry	12/Aug/2013	0	£18,500.00	£18,500.00
Lislaynan, Ballycarry	12/Aug/2013	0	£7,400.00	£7,400.00
Seven Springs, Larne	10/Sep/2009	4	£102,200.00	£51,100.00
Porter Green, Larne	02/Aug/2011	2	£40,700.00	£20,350.00
Logans Loanen, Larne	26/OCT/2012	1	£31,400.00	£3,140.00
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	03/Mar/2010	3	£59,500.00	£29,750.00

Site	Date Bonded	Time outstanding (Years)	Initial Bond Value	Current Bond value
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	03/Mar/2010	3	£51,800.00	£25,900.00
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	23/May/2011	2	£11,500.00	£5,750.00
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	05/Oct/2011	2	£34,100.00	£17,050.00
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	29/Nov/2011	2	£19,700.00	£9,850.00
Larne West Distributor Road, Larne	13/Apr/2012	1	£50,300.00	£50,300.00
Ballyhampton Road, Larne	03/Dec/2012	0	£44,400.00	£44,400.00
Rose Place, Islandmagee	02/Oct/2012	1	£33,700.00	£33,700.00
Rose Place, Islandmagee	02/Oct/2012	1	£32,900.00	£32,900.00
Redlands Road, Larne	16/Jul/2012	1	£172,000.00	£172,000.00
Curran Road, Larne	24/Jan/2012	1	£33,300.00	£33,300.00
Curran Road, Larne	24/Jan/2012	1	£3,900.00	£3,900.00
Gorse Meadow, Larne	20/Mar/2012	1	£29,800.00	£29,800.00

Glens of Antrim: Road Surety Bonds

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25973/11-15, to detail the residential developments in the Glens of Antrim that have a Road Surety Bond.

(AQW 26962/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of residential developments in the Glens of Antrim that have a Road Surety Bond are included in the table below:

Residential Developments in the Glens of Antrim that have a Road Surety Bond

Location	Date Sealed
Bayfields, Carnlough	2 November 2006
Bayfields, Carnlough	10 May 2007
Cregagh View, Knocknacarry	14 November 2008

Cyclists: Belfast Central to City Centre

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25260/11-15, to outline the issues that Roads Service is aware of in regard to cyclists using the route from Central Station to Belfast City Centre.

(AQW 26971/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: With regard to cyclists at this location, the issues are the same as for all road users across the public road network, namely that they can go about their daily business effectively and without undue concern over delays or safety.

Magherafelt: Car Park Revenue

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total income derived from car parking fees in Magherafelt Town Centre on each Saturday for the last three months.

(AQW 27019/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of income from car parks in Magherafelt are provided in the table below:

Date	Car Parking Charges Income (£)
06/07/2013	1,010.37
13/07/2013	* 0.00
20/07/2013	877.05
27/07/2013	960.83

Date	Car Parking Charges Income (£)
03/08/2013	1,030.09
10/08/2013	963.95
17/08/2013	1,008.78
24/08/2013	1,081.30
31/08/2013	1,105.29
07/09/2013	1,116.89
14/09/2013	1,076.71
21/09/2013	1,068.89
28/09/2013	1,119.20

* 13 July 2013 is one of 6 days when charges do not apply.

Ulsterbus 212 Service

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of people using the Ulsterbus 212 service at (i) Belfast; (ii) Toome; (iii) Dungiven; and (iv) Londonderry, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 27027/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number of passengers boarding and alighting at the locations referred to, in the last five years, is detailed in the table below. You should note that the totals for boardings and alightings are not the same as there are other stops along the 212 service. The figures represent journeys undertaken rather actual numbers of people.

212 Passenger Information by Stage

2008/2009

Boarding	Passengers
Belfast	228867
Dungiven	50217
L/Derry	217249
Toome Bypass	22815

Alighting	Passengers
Belfast	319095
Dungiven	25530
L/Derry	188895
Toome Bypass	15005

2009/2010

Boarding	Passengers
Belfast	237181
Dungiven	45587
L/Derry	214935
Toome Bypass	23068

Alighting	Passengers
Belfast	309480
Dungiven	27010
L/Derry	188849
Toome Bypass	17262

2010/2011

Boarding	Passengers
Belfast	250735
Dungiven	46334
L/Derry	200416
Toome Bypass	21059

Alighting	Passengers
Belfast	313266
Dungiven	28615
L/Derry	199617
Toome Bypass	16296

2011/12

Boarding	Passengers
Belfast	267539
Dungiven	51410
L/Derry	195599
Toome Bypass	22747

Alighting	Passengers
Belfast	330874
Dungiven	31110
L/Derry	213077
Toome Bypass	18346

2012/13

Boarding	Passengers
Belfast	299732
Dungiven	55421
L/Derry	220369
Toome Bypass	26251

Alighting	Passengers
Belfast	372762
Dungiven	32504
L/Derry	241530
Toome Bypass	21188

Free Parking: Construction Workers and Tradespeople

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to introduce free parking for construction workers and tradespeople for a limited period whilst work is being carried out on nearby premises.

(AQW 27030/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am not aware of any current proposal to introduce free parking for circumstances such as you have described.

Cycling Fatalities: Albert Bridge, Belfast

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has made an assessment of the risk of cycling fatalities where city centre bound lanes and traffic merge at the start of the Albert Bridge, Belfast.

(AQW 27035/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The bus lane / cycle facility on the Albertbridge Road, approaching the Albert Bridge, was provided in 1996 to accommodate buses, cyclists and taxis approaching the city centre. The merge arrangement, provided at the end of the bus lane, where the road narrows for the Albert Bridge, is a common layout which operates at other locations in Belfast and elsewhere.

Collision records, provided by the PSNI, for this location are monitored, as part of the normal collision data gathering exercise. Over the last five years records show there have been no reported injury collisions at this merge location, involving cyclists.

Grass Cutting

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Roads Service has spent on grass cutting in the North Down Constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 27068/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain an analysis of grass cutting expenditure by Constituency area; however, it can provide details of total expenditure in Roads Eastern Division on Grass Cutting and Environmental Maintenance. Expenditure for each of the last three years is detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	Eastern Division Spend on Grass Cutting and Environmental Maintenance £000's
2010/11	2,005
2011/12	1,815
2012/13	2,026
Total	5,846

The Councils listed in the table below are those that would be primarily classed as being in the Roads Eastern Divisional area.

Council Area

- Belfast City Council
- Carrickfergus Borough Council
- Castlereagh Borough Council
- Lisburn City Council
- Newtownabbey Borough Council
- North Down Borough Council

DRD: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 27069/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to promoting inclusion and provision for people with a disability and achieves this in a number of ways as detailed below:

Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS)

The ATS was published in 2005 and seeks to address the wide ranging barriers that impede the use of the transport system by people with a disability and also looks at the improvements to the physical environment including the accessibility of bus and rail stations and to town and city centres. The Strategy has been implemented through a series of action plans. The current action plan covers the policies and actions to be progressed during the period 2012-2015. Copies of the ATS and the latest action plan can be accessed on the Department's website via these links

- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/accessible_transport_strategy_for_northern_ireland_2015-10.pdf
- <http://drdinsite.intranet.nigov.net/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=8583>

Blue Badge Disabled Parking Scheme

This is an important service for people with severe mobility problems that enables holders to park close to where they need to go. Blue Badges enable people with a disability to access services and facilities through a range of parking concessions.

DRD Equality Scheme

The Scheme sets out how my Department intends to meet its commitments under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 75 is mainstreamed across business areas and all new or revised policies are subject to equality screening to assess impacts on all nine equality categories set out under Section 75, including people with a disability. The Equality Scheme also contains an action plan setting out action measures we propose to take during the period 2011-2016 to address key inequalities which have been identified relating to my Department's functions, and includes a few aimed specifically at improving inequalities for people with a disability.

My Department has also recently submitted an Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission which contains a number of good practice examples of how Section 75 commitments have been met during the 2012-2013 year.

The Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities Action Plan is available on my Department's website via this link:

- <http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=6707>

Disability Action Plan

My Department also has in place a Disability Action Plan which sets out how we propose to meet the two disability duties under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. We have also recently published a five-year review of our Disability Action Plans which sets out the progress made in meeting these duties over the years since the introduction of our first Disability Action Plan on 1 July 2007.

The Disability Action Plan and Five Year Review are available on my Department's website via these links:

- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/drd_dap_2013_14_font_pdf_309kb
- http://www.drdni.gov.uk/drd_dap_consultation_report_and_five_year_review_2013__14_font_pdf

Drain Blockages: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many drain blockages were reported in the North Down area in the last financial year.

(AQW 27087/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the 2012 /2013 financial year, 106 blocked drainage systems in the North Down area were reported to my Department's Roads Service. It should be noted not all the reports related to systems which are the maintenance responsibility of Roads Service.

Northern Ireland Water informs me the number of sewer blockages in the North Down Council area in the last financial year was 828. On average 65 per cent of these blockages were caused by inappropriate items being placed in the sewerage network.

Road Calming: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to put further road calming measures in the North Down area.

(AQW 27088/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: 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 advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and so it is not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Derry Train Station: Consultation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development when the findings of the public consultation on a potential new train station for Derry will be published.

(AQW 27293/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The consultation report was shared with this Department in early September. We have asked Translink to take forward an economic appraisal as a matter of urgency. I see the consultation as one element of the economic appraisal and planning process. That economic appraisal is being progressed to look at all costs and benefits and funding scenarios.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Community Projects

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has spent on community projects in each of the last five years; and how such projects will be funded after the proposed social housing reforms.

(AQW 26720/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive has detailed their funding on community projects in each of the last five years in the tables below.

Table 1 – Housing Executive Restorative Justice Payments

Year	Northern Ireland Alternatives	Community Restorative Justice Ireland
2008/09	£24,500	-
2009/10	£35,000	£35,000
2010/11	£37,500	£37,500
2011/12	£37,500	£37,500
2012/13	£60,000	£60,000

Table 2 – Housing Executive Community Cohesion Funding

Year	
2008/09	£122,364.52
2009/10	£211,237.00
2010/11	£266,737.00
2011/12	£256,515.90
2012/13	£236,016.67
2013/14 (at 08/10/2013)	£176,563.99
2011 to date (Shared Communities Programme)	£ 67,579.55

Table 3 – Housing Executive Community Development Funding

Year	
2008/09	£930,830
2009/10	£792,386

Year	
2010/11	£1,028,779
2011/12	£900,628
2012/13	£876,513

However, at this stage of the Social housing Reform Programme it is too early to state how community projects will be funded in the future, this will become clearer as structures for the future delivery of Landlord and non Landlord services are developed.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Support Band Grade Staff

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale for outsourcing Support Band Grade staff within his Department.

(AQW 26721/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The decision by the Department for Social Development to outsource its Soft Services was an operational one driven by a need to achieve efficiencies.

The Department is working to support the affected staff who have the option to: (i) transfer to another NICS department; (ii) transfer laterally to an administrative post within DSD (where staff meet the qualifying conditions); or, (iii) transfer to the new provider under TUPE.

Support Grade Band Staff: Pay and Conditions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what guarantees he can give that current and future Support Grade Band staff's pay and conditions will not be reduced as a result of outsourcing these functions.

(AQW 26722/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pay and conditions of staff associated with the functions to be the subject of the contract will be matters for the contractor. However, those permanent NICS Support Grade Band staff who transfer to the contractor will do so under the protection afforded by The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 and the Service Provision Change (Protection of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, collectively known as 'TUPE'.

Housing Executive: Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of reported anti-social behaviour cases in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26729/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary Constituency. The information is also not available for 2012/13 as the Housing Executive's new Management System was being implemented at that time and reporting was suspended.

The attached table details the number of reported anti-social behaviour cases in Housing Executive properties from 2007/08 to 2011/12 by Housing Executive local office area.

Table 1 – Reported Anti-Social Behaviour Cases: -

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
East	48	51	52	328	295
West	283	340	373	92	104
North	110	182	189	230	290
Shankill	15	30	41	270	172
South	37	88	104	34	40
Belfast Area Total	493	691	759	954	901
Bangor	230	201	225	233	234
Newtownards	226	160	173	188	242
Castlereagh	191	139	137	171	99

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Lisburn	423	463	261	216	247
Dairyfarm	169	99	137	108	142
Downpatrick	81	142	218	189	189
South East Area Total	1320	1204	1151	1105	1153
Banbridge	118	132	112	103	66
Newry	252	286	301	290	305
Armagh	73	92	58	120	65
Lurgan	83	90	140	164	131
Portadown	64	113	134	87	66
Dungannon	53	67	103	102	110
Fermanagh	147	127	186	233	167
South Area Total	790	907	1034	1099	910
Ballymena	233	112	75	98	117
Antrim	306	348	252	173	136
Newtownabbey 1	132	67	104	100	86
Newtownabbey 2	34	64	170	155	121
Carrickfergus	49	62	135	154	126
Larne	64	78	69	73	77
Ballycastle	42	32	26	27	33
Ballymoney	91	89	87	57	69
Coleraine	115	81	81	67	94
North East Area Total	1066	933	999	904	859
Waterloo	18	32	54	15	75
Waterside	85	96	113	58	103
Collon Terrace	166	209	192	123	162
Limavady	31	64	98	85	56
Magherafelt	46	50	65	48	61
Strabane	47	79	93	121	136
Omagh	99	72	76	91	89
Cookstown	28	53	50	64	56
West Area total	520	655	741	605	738
NI Total	4189	4390	4684	4667	4561

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Housing Executive: Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of reported anti-social behaviour cases in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties that were resolved in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency. (AQW 26732/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate data by Parliamentary Constituency. The information is also only available for the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12.

The Housing Executive has advised that Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) cases are resolved in a variety of ways. The Housing Executive receives about 4,500 reports of ASB every year, the majority of which are dealt with quickly and effectively by Housing Officers and Neighbourhood Officers through personal contact and warning letters. If such action does not resolve

the ASB, the Housing Executive can instigate a more intensive intervention through its centralised Community Safety Team. Such actions include the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts or the offer of mediation and community support. The most serious cases of ASB may have to be addressed through legal action including injunctions and, as a last resort, repossession of properties.

The tables below provide details of the number of ASB cases in Housing Executive properties 2010/11 and 2011/12 broken down by Housing Executive District Office area: -

District Office ASB Activity Period: April 10 - March 11

Housing Executive Area	Recorded Cases Simple Complex		Cases Referred to ACSO	NSP/NOP Served	Decrees Obtained	Injunctions Granted	Under Takings	Possessions Obtained	ABC'S Signed	APAC / Floating Support Referrals	Mediation referrals
Belfast											
North	162	108	12	3	2	0	0	9	1	0	5
South	213	17	5	1	1	0	0	3	1	1	4
East	87	5	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
West	293	35	10	1	1	0	0	5	3	2	10
Shankill	32	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Area Total	787	167	28	6	5	0	0	18	5	3	19
South East											
Bangor	220	13	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
N'ards	172	16	7	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
C'reagh	154	17	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Lisburn	207	9	3	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	2
Dairy Farm	106	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Downpatrick	182	7	7	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
Area Total	1041	64	33	5	3	0	0	5	1	1	18
South											
Banbridge	72	31	3	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Newry	251	39	3	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Armagh	95	25	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Lurgan	99	65	8	1	0	0	0	6	2	0	3
Portadown	58	29	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1
Dungannon	87	15	3	2	2	0	0	4	0	0	1
Fermanagh	170	63	21	2	3	0	0	9	5	4	3
Area Total	832	267	41	11	5	1	0	25	7	7	10
North East											
Ballymena	94	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Antrim	158	15	9	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	2
N'abbey1	90	10	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
N'abbey2	150	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0
C'fergus	152	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Larne	69	4	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2

Housing Executive Area	Recorded Cases Simple Complex		Cases Referred to ACSO	NSP/NOP Served	Decrees Obtained	Injunctions Granted	Under Takings	Possessions Obtained	ABC'S Signed	APAC / Floating Support Referrals	Mediation referrals
Ballycastle	24	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ballymoney	48	9	9	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Coleraine	64	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Area Total	849	55	39	3	1	0	0	7	6	10	16
West											
Waterloo	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Waterside	51	7	3	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
Collon Terrace	117	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Limavady	67	18	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Magherafelt	44	4	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Strabane	116	5	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Omagh	84	7	3	0	0	0	0	2	1	4	1
Cookstown	52	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Area Total	546	59	25	1	1	0	0	7	2	4	15
Overall Totals	4055	612	166	26	15	1	0	62	21	25	78*

* Figures For Mediation Do Not Include Cases Outsourced To Northern Ireland Alternatives Or Community Restorative Justice Ireland.

ACSO – Area Community Safety Officer, ABC – Anti-social Behaviour Contract, NSP – Notice Seeking Possession, NOP – Notice of Possession

District Office ASB Activity Period: April 11 - March 2012

Housing Executive Area	Recorded Cases Simple Complex		Cases Referred to ACSO	NSP/NOP Served	Decrees Obtained	Injunctions Granted	Under Takings	Possessions Obtained	ABCs Signed	APAC / Floating Support Referrals	Mediation referrals
Belfast											
North	102	70	7	3	0	0	0	3	2	2	1
South	281	9	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	2
East	88	16	8	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	3
West	259	36	8	0	0	0	0	5	3	1	4
Shankill	39	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	3
Area Total	769	132	25	3	0	1	0	10	9	10	13
South East											
Bangor	226	8	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
N'ards	223	19	8	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
C'reagh	88	11	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Lisburn	231	16	11	4	0	0	0	5	0	0	1

Housing Executive Area	Recorded Cases Simple Complex		Cases Referred to ACSO	NSP/NOP Served	Decrees Obtained	Injunctions Granted	Under Takings	Possessions Obtained	ABCs Signed	APAC / Floating Support Referrals	Mediation referrals
Dairy Farm	140	2	3	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	2
Downpatrick	179	10	6	2	2	0	1	3	0	0	5
Area Total	1087	66	34	11	3	1	1	11	0	1	20
South											
Banbridge	47	19	1	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Newry	228	74	3	1	1	0	0	3	1	1	5
Armagh	60	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Lurgan	109	22	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	4
Portadown	40	26	4	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Dungannon	96	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Fermanagh	148	19	5	0	1	0	0	8	0	0	2
Area Total	728	179	16	7	6	0	0	14	2	4	17
North East											
Ballymena	116	1	3	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1
Antrim	130	6	7	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	1
N'abbey1	79	7	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
N'abbey2	119	2	6	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
C'fergus	125	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4
Larne	70	7	6	2	0	0	0	0	3	3	1
Ballycastle	27	6	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0
Ballymoney	62	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Coleraine	86	8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Area Total	814	45	35	2	1	1	0	7	10	9	19
West											
Waterloo	68	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Waterside	91	12	4	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	2
Collon Terrace	141	21	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	50	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Magherafelt	60	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Strabane	125	11	7	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	4
Omagh	79	10	11	0	0	0	0	6	1	1	1
Cookstown	52	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Area Total	666	72	30	0	0	0	0	9	4	10	14
Overall Totals	4064	494	140	23	10	3	1	51	25	34	83 *

* This figure of 83 for Mediation does not include the 184 cases outsourced to Restorative Justice Groups, Community Restorative Justice Ireland & Northern Ireland Alternatives in the Greater Belfast and North Down Areas

ACSO – Area Community Safety Officer, ABC – Anti-social Behaviour Contract, NSP – Notice Seeking Possession
NOP – Notice of Possession

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Housing Executive: Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the effectiveness of the current Northern Ireland Housing Executive policy on dealing with anti-social behaviour at its properties.
(AQW 26733/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Community safety is a quality of life issue which impacts on all of society, individually and collectively. The Housing Executive first launched its Community Safety Team in 2000 and the effectiveness of the organisation in addressing Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) has improved year on year.

The Housing Executive has a well-developed system for tackling ASB based on a written strategy, currently being updated, which sets out their objectives and priorities. These objectives have been aligned with those set out in the Department of Justice community safety strategy, Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities. The Housing Executive has also produced and published a 40 page Statement of Policy and Procedures on ASB which details the services it provides and the procedures it uses to investigate and remedy reported incidents of ASB.

The Housing Executive's use of standardised ASB documentation facilitates a consistent approach by the Executive's staff across the whole organisation. The Statement of Policy and Procedures on ASB provides the foundation stone of the Housing Executive's competency-based staff training programme. This programme is delivered to all front line housing staff with a role in tackling ASB.

In addressing ASB, the Housing Executive employs an incremental and proportionate approach at all times. It works with the perpetrator through a range of interventions in an attempt to keep the individual in their home, while at the same time addressing the ASB. However, if the individual fails to respond to offers of assistance and the ASB continues, or if the ASB is of such a serious nature that the Housing Executive must take immediate action, then it will use the legal powers available to it to ensure that the victims of ASB are protected and the unacceptable behaviour is stopped.

The Housing Executive's non statutory interventions include warning letters, Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, mediation, and community support. In addition, the Housing Executive is one of the founding partners and participants - along with PSNI and local councils - in the ASB forums which meet to discuss ASB in nearly every council area. They also have 65 Neighbourhood Officers who contribute to making their estates cleaner and safer places to live. The Housing Executive also contributes funding to various schemes, for example the 4 Tier Scheme in Antrim and Newtownabbey and a number of night time warden schemes to address crime and the fear of crime on its estates.

Housing Executive legal interventions can take a number of forms, up to and including repossession of a property.

Most of the Housing Executive's interventions, statutory or non statutory, are based firmly on the principle of partnership working. ASB is not an issue which can be dealt with by one statutory agency working in isolation. It requires the intervention of all the relevant government bodies working closely with the community to deliver real results, so working together with other groups and agencies forms the core of their ASB strategy. The Housing Executive's unique contribution to these collaborative efforts is its staff's experience of community safety issues and their knowledge of grassroots concerns.

A cost analysis of the Housing Executive's ASB services in 2010/2011, in which the organisation's ASB unit costs were compared with other UK services using the Housemark Benchmarking methodology, placed the Housing Executive in the Upper Quartile of services examined.

To further support current policy, I will, in the near future, be publishing proposals for new legislation to help the Housing Executive and other social landlords to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Empty Homes Loan Fund

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what impact a successful bid for £3.6m for an Empty Homes Loan Fund in the October monitoring round will have on the number of empty properties in 2014.
(AQW 26735/11-15)

Mr McCausland: On the basis of the original outline proposal submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel, a successful bid of £3.6m for an Empty Home Loans Fund estimated that approximately 60 empty homes could be brought back into use.

However, in light of further evidence, from other jurisdictions, my officials are seeking to refine the proposals in an effort to substantially increase the number of empty homes that could be brought back into use with such funding.

Social Security Agency: Sanctions

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people who were sanctioned by the Social Security Agency in each of the last two years, including the type and length of sanction.
(AQW 26744/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the tables below.

Benefit Fraud Sanctions	2011-2012	2012-2013
Convictions	519	567
Administrative Penalties	506	491
Total Sanctions	1025	1058

Loss of Benefit Sanctions Sept 12 to Aug 13	20% Reduction in Benefit	40% Reduction in Benefit	Loss of Benefit	Total
4 weeks "One Strike"	10	21	69	100
13 weeks "Two Strikes"	0	2	1	3
Total	10	23	70	103

Benefit Fraud

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how many benefit claimants have been reported for potential sanction in each of the last two years.

(AQW 26746/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

	2011-2012	2012-2013
Number of reports of potential benefit fraud received	5935	6151

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development when he will introduce legislation to empower asset transfer of public resources to the third and social enterprise sectors, as anticipated in the Programme for Government 2011-15.

(AQW 26754/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Consultation on a draft policy framework for Community Asset Transfer concluded on 23rd August 2013. When I have considered the responses received I will bring forward my proposals to the Executive. While the Programme for Government made no commitment to introduce legislation, the question of whether legislation is needed is one of a range of issues that will be addressed in the policy framework.

Double Glazing: Donaghadee and Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the timetable for the completion of the installation of double glazing in homes in the (i) Donaghadee; and (ii) Millisle areas.

(AQW 26760/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the remaining dwellings in Donaghadee and Millisle that require double glazing are included in a planned scheme: Ards District Double Glazing Mop-Up. The Housing Executive is currently unable to provide a definitive start date for this scheme as they are still in the process of appointing contractors to deliver the double glazing programme.

Jobs and Benefits Offices: Missed Calls

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of missed calls to each Jobs and Benefits Office in 2012/13.

(AQW 26778/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As part of an ongoing modernisation programme, the Social Security Agency has over the past two years, been reorganising its telephony services for Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support and Social Fund. This has involved installing a new network infrastructure and centralising telephony services into a smaller number of centres. These centres are Andersonstown, Antrim, Coleraine, Falls Road, Foyle, Lisburn, Knockbreda, Magherafelt, Omagh and Royston House, with each centre supporting a number of other Jobs and Benefits offices.

Information requested for the 2012/13 financial year is only available from those sites where the new telephony service was operational at that time and is set out in the following table:

Table A - Social Fund, Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance Call Data 2012/2013

Site	Benefit Type	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Not Answered
Andersonstown	Income Support	51512	49980	1532
Andersonstown	Jobseekers Allowance	70174	67803	2371
Antrim	Social Fund	54685	53669	1016
Coleraine	Income Support	54729	52376	2353
Lisburn	Social Fund	59148	58290	858
Magherafelt	Jobseekers Allowance	66847	65916	931
Totals		357095	348034	9061

The five remaining centres became operational on the following dates:

- Foyle – 20 March 2013
- Falls Road – 22 March 2013
- Royston House – 22 March 2013
- Knockbreda – 26 March 2013
- Omagh – 10 April 2013

Housing: Discretionary Payments

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how many people who applied for Discretionary Housing payments in the last three years had their application refused.

(AQW 26794/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of people who have applied for Discretionary Housing payments in the last three years and had their application refused is detailed in the table below.

Period	Awards refused
2011/12	427
2012/13	2,063
2013/14 (to 30/09/2013)	1,379

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Kilcooley Estate, Bangor: Allotment Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the Kilcooley Estate in Bangor have gained employment as a result of the allotment scheme.

(AQW 26798/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Kilcooley allotment scheme is a health project the objective of which is to provide a base from which structured activities aimed at addressing mental health, physical health, general well-being initiatives, victim support and people still affected by trauma, can be offered for local residents. There are no objectives relating to creation of employment and information of this nature is not, therefore, recorded.

Jobseeker's Allowance: Under 25s

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of the percentage of Job Seekers Allowance claimants, under the age of 25, who are single parents.

(AQW 26800/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At May 2013, there were 15,890 Jobseekers Allowance claimants aged under 25, of whom 100 were single parents. This represents 0.6% of the total figure.

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Benefit Recipients: Under 25s

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of benefits recipients under the age of 25; and the number of these people in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance.

(AQW 26803/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At May 2013, there were 35,230 benefit recipients aged 16 to 25, of which 15,390 were Jobseekers Allowance recipients.

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Fuel Poverty

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to bring forward programmes to tackle fuel poverty in the top 13% of areas identified as being in extreme fuel poverty.

(AQW 26852/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Warm Homes Scheme is my Department's main fuel poverty scheme which helps privately owned and privately rented low income households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. The Warm Homes Scheme has an annual target of installing energy efficiency improvements in 9,000 homes and has been meeting the target consistently since 2009. The Warm Homes Scheme provides a range of measures, including insulation of lofts and cavity walls, to make homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient.

In addition, the boiler replacement scheme which is available in Northern Ireland only, helps owner occupiers to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. To date 7,320 replacement boilers have been installed. The scheme is open to owner occupiers whose household income is less than £40,000 and who have a boiler which is at least 15 years old.

My Department recently completed an Achieving Affordable Warmth area based pilot, in partnership with OFMdfM, DARD, the University of Ulster, Housing Executive and 19 local Councils. The aim of this unique approach was to deliver energy efficiency improvements to homes in small concentrated areas using a targeting tool developed by the University of Ulster. Targeting enabled the Department to identify areas of poor housing and low incomes indicating a high prevalence of fuel poverty. The University's evaluation of the pilot estimates that one in two houses contacted proved eligible for assistance from the Warm Homes Scheme. Following on from these positive results we have now moved onto phase 2 of the pilot, which is to test how the energy efficiency measures can be delivered using local installers to carry out the work. This will mean that those homes identified and proven to be eligible for energy efficiency improvements in phase 2 of this pilot will have those improvements delivered by a local installer not contracted to the Warm Homes Scheme. This part of the pilot has only recently commenced and my Department will be reporting and evaluating on the outcomes over the coming months. All councils are aware of the pilot and my Department is working closely with them.

Community Groups: Allotments and Gardens

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what grants are available to community groups to develop allotments and gardens.

(AQW 26855/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not have specific grants available for community groups to develop allotments and gardens. However, through its Neighbourhood Renewal Programme funding may be considered where a priority need is identified within local Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans and where resources are available.

Housing Executive Schemes: Ards and North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive Schemes are planned, in the next financial year, for each housing estate in (i) Ards; and (ii) North Down.

(AQW 26860/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has provided details of schemes currently programmed in 2014/15 for Newtownards and Bangor District Office areas as set out in the Table attached.

District	Estate	Work Group	No of Dwgs	Year Currently Programmed
Newtownards	Movilla	ECM	207	14/15
Bangor	Kilcooley	ECM	322	14/15
Bangor	Rathgill/Willowbrook	Kitchens	37	14/15
Bangor	Loughview	Double glazing	54	14/15
Bangor	Loughview	ECM	289	14/15

District	Estate	Work Group	No of Dwgs	Year Currently Programmed
Bangor	Redburn	Double glazing	43	14/15
Bangor	Spencer St/Woodlands	Double glazing	81	14/15
Bangor	Conlig	Double glazing	10	14/15

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Turkington Holdings Limited

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to list the occasions on which he has met with representatives of Turkington Holdings Limited or any of its subsidiaries.

(AQW 26867/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A meeting I had with the Glass and Glazing Federation on 16 April 2012 was attended by representatives of Turkington Holdings Ltd.

Housing Executive: Underspend

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the underspend in Housing Executive budgets; and whether this underspend can be directed towards tackling fuel poverty.

(AQW 26869/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The underspend in the current financial year is £35 million and is made up as follows:

- £10 million was declared as an easement in June Monitoring as planned maintenance procurement has not been completed and contracts have not been let. This funding is no longer available.
- £25 million has been declared at the October Monitoring Round, the majority of which is from the Housing Executive's maintenance budgets including delays issuing new contracts for planned maintenance and double glazing.

The underspend cannot be directed towards tackling fuel poverty because:

- The Housing Executive is already addressing fuel poverty, by heating replacement and insulation schemes to its own properties. Where there are no contractual issues, the in year target is expected to be achieved.
- Housing Executive budgets are directed towards social housing stock and are therefore not suitable for transfer to schemes which target owner occupiers and private rented properties.
- The Warm Homes, Fuel Poverty and Boiler Replacement Schemes are in place for private sector properties and this year a budget of £23 million has been made available.

Oaklee Housing Association

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 20017/11-15, and given that Oaklee Housing Association outlined a start date for the properties of August/September 2013, when he expects this work to commence.

(AQW 26872/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Work is currently out to tender with plans to now start work on the refurbishment of the first ten houses in December 2013.

Housing Executive: Antisocial Behaviour

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what his Department is doing to help address violence and anti-social behaviour in housing estates.

(AQW 26920/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have a range of interventions for tackling violence and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in housing estates. Warning letters have proved extremely successful in stemming ASB, often stopping unacceptable behaviour before more robust action becomes necessary.

While many disputes are resolved through informal discussion by the parties involved, mediation provides an alternative when that is unsuccessful. The Housing Executive introduced its own in house Mediation Service in 2002/03 and now has over 30 accredited external mediators. They also use the services of community based restorative justice groups, Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA) and Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) to provide community based mediation as a means of addressing reported incidents of ASB in many areas.

The Housing Executive also makes use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts which are voluntary written agreements between the Housing Executive and persons involved in ASB. The Housing Executive has advised that, since their introduction in 2006/07, Acceptable Behaviour Contracts have proved to be helpful in stopping ASB. If the individual fails to respond to

offers of assistance and the ASB continues, or if the ASB is of such a serious nature that the Housing Executive must take immediate action, they will then use legal interventions that are available. For example they may choose to repossess the property occupied by the perpetrator, or may seek an injunction to stop the ASB and protect the community.

Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP) and District and Community Safety Partnerships (DCSP) are statutory bodies established under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Under the Act, Councils are obliged to establish a PCSP structure in their locality. The overall purpose of these bodies is to help make communities safer and to ensure that the views of local people are heard on policing and community safety issues. The Housing Executive is a designated body for the purposes of the Justice Act and is expected to send a representative to the PCSP for each council area.

The Housing Executive has 65 Neighbourhood Officers in post who contribute to making their estates cleaner and safer places to live. The Housing Executive also funds various schemes with partner agencies to address crime and the fear of crime on their estates. The 4 Tier Scheme in Antrim and Newtownabbey is an example of partnership working, and provides a flexible tailored approach to meet specific crime prevention and community safety needs. The Housing Executive is also involved in the funding of a number of night-time warden schemes aimed at addressing issues of ASB and nuisance related incidents. The wardens work with local PSNI Neighbourhood Policing Teams and also with Housing Executive staff, and act as a point of contact for the public who have concerns regarding ASB, especially at nights or weekends.

My Department is also supporting Housing Associations to effectively tackle violence and anti-social behaviour. This included a training event my Department funded and ran with Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations last year to disseminate good practice.

All Housing Associations are expected to have anti-social behaviour policies in place. Local Housing Associations are using a range of programmes including the REACT programme and the Chartered Institute of Housing's Respect programme, to help ensure housing officers are well-trained in dealing with these matters. When specific problems occur, Housing Associations work closely with the PSNI and Housing Executive in the first instance, then with mediation and other agencies to address issues with tenants. Associations are also doing a range of preventative work, such as Helm Housing's anti-bullying, anti-violence work with primary schools on both sides of the community in Belfast.

To further support current policy, I will, in the near future, be publishing proposals for new legislation to help the Housing Executive and other social landlords to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Fuel Poverty

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the work of the Inter-Departmental Group on Fuel Poverty, including when it last met.
(AQW 26921/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Interdepartmental Group on Fuel Poverty and the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group merged in 2011 to become the Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum. The Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum last met on 22 August 2013.

The Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum introduced thematic sub groups to consider how fuel poverty could be tackled under the following themes:

- Affordable Warmth;
- Prevention;
- Targeting; and,
- Opportunities, synergies and risks.

The groups have been working for over one year and have produced detailed action plans. I have asked officials to review the role of the Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum and sub groups to ensure that the most appropriate structures are in place to support the Department's Fuel Poverty strategy.

Fuel Poverty

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the work of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group on Fuel Poverty, including when it last met.
(AQW 26922/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Fuel Poverty Advisory Group and the Interdepartmental Group on Fuel Poverty merged in 2011 to become the Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum. The Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum last met on 22 August 2013.

The Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum introduced thematic sub groups to consider how fuel poverty could be tackled under the following themes:

- Affordable Warmth;
- Prevention;
- Targeting; and,
- Opportunities, synergies and risks.

The groups have been working for over one year and have produced detailed action plans. I have asked officials to review the role of the Cross Sectoral Fuel Poverty Forum and sub groups to ensure that the most appropriate structures are in place to support the Department's Fuel Poverty strategy.

Housing: Co-ownership

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been assisted in buying their own home under the Co-Ownership housing scheme since its inception; and what is the uptake of this scheme in North Antrim compared with other constituencies.

(AQW 26923/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since its inception the Co-Ownership scheme has supported 23,369 households to buy their own home.

The information is not readily available in the constituency format requested. The table below details the number of homes purchased under the Co-Ownership Scheme since its inception, broken down by Council area.

Council Area	Cumulative Total at 30 September 2013
Derry City Council	1308
Limavady Borough Council	405
Coleraine Borough Council	1190
Ballymoney Borough Council	338
Moyle District Council	114
Larne Borough Council	329
Ballymena Borough Council	537
Magherafelt District Council	425
Cookstown District Council	383
Strabane District Council	226
Omagh District Council	317
Fermanagh District Council	295
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	243
Craigavon Borough Council	1587
Armagh City and District Council	296
Newry and Mourne District Council	583
Banbridge District Council	446
Down District Council	836
Lisburn City Council	2208
Antrim Borough Council	701
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1690
Carrickfergus Borough Council	1046
North Down Borough Council	2716
Ards Borough Council	1413
Castlereagh Borough Council	974
Belfast City Council	2763
Total	23,369

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Employment Support Allowance: Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what advice is available to people facing Employment Support Allowance assessments, including specific advice for people with a mental illness.

(AQW 26926/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Throughout the application process for Employment and Support Allowance there is a range of advice and support available including: an enquiry line to provide advice and guidance to claimants as they progress through the assessment process; telephony staff who are trained to identify if a claimant is having difficulty in making a claim and in such circumstances they will advise the claimant that an advocate can complete the call on their behalf; and the offer of face to face assistance at a local Jobs & Benefits/Social Security Office.

Claimants are encouraged to bring a friend or companion with them to a work capability assessment, and are advised of the importance of supplying all relevant medical evidence at a number of stages throughout the claim process: at the initial claim stage; when completing a limited capability for work questionnaire; when attending a medical examination; when contacted prior to a disallowance decision being made; and upon receipt of an appeal.

For those claimants undergoing Incapacity Benefit reassessment, there are a number of contact points at key stages to provide support and ensure that they understand what is happening and to advise what to do next. Claimants are contacted by telephone as the process begins to explain why changes are being made, what they need to do and what will happen next. This initial call also reassures the claimant that further support will be available throughout the reassessment process. If a claimant is not entitled to Employment and Support Allowance a member of the Claimant Advice and Support Team will make contact with them to discuss their options and provide further help and assistance, which includes help with making a claim to another benefit and help with appealing the disallowance decision.

Special arrangements are in place to safeguard claimants who suffer from a mental health condition. If they fail to return their medical questionnaire they will not be automatically disallowed, but instead invited to attend a medical assessment. If a claimant with mental health incapacity fails to attend their medical assessment or subsequently fails to make contact with the Employment and Support Allowance Centre or the Incapacity Benefit Reassessment Office, a visit can be carried out to ensure the claimant clearly understands their obligations. This visit is also aimed at preventing unnecessary disallowance of the benefit entitlement of these vulnerable claimants.

Benefits: Mental Illness

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how reforms to the benefit system will result in more clarity for people with a mental illness.
(AQW 26927/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill contains a number of proposed reforms aimed at protecting those most in need; simplifying the benefit system and making work pay. Key reforms include:

Universal Credit – Universal Credit, when introduced, will replace income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA (IR)) as well as other benefits including Income Support; Jobseeker's Allowance (income related) and Tax Credits. Universal Credit will mean that people can see how work will benefit them as there will be one taper applied to their net earnings.

Personal Independence Payment – Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will replace Disability Living Allowance for those of working age (16-64). It will be a non-contributory, non-means-tested, non-taxable cash benefit payable to people whether they are in or out of work. The PIP assessment criteria have been designed to better identify those most in need of extra support to live independently and participate in everyday life.

In terms of providing clarity for people with a mental illness, under Universal Credit there will be additional elements payable for those claimants who have limited capability for work and/or work related activity, this includes claimants with a mental illness. To determine the level of capability, an assessment will be undertaken by a health care professional and as is currently the case, the assessment will include a specific mental, cognitive and intellectual function test. Details of the tasks/functions to be examined together with the number of points allocated for each will be described in the proposed Universal Credit Regulations.

In relation to Personal Independence Payment my officials have worked closely with the Department for Work and Pensions during the development of the assessment criteria to ensure that changes being proposed take into account the differences in the Disability Living Allowance caseload here, in particular highlighting circumstances around mental health.

The current eligibility conditions for Disability Living Allowance focus mostly on physical disability however the assessment for Personal Independence Payment will look at disabled people as individuals and will not base entitlement on having a particular disability or impairment, but instead will consider the individual's ability to carry out key everyday activities. In terms of providing clarity for people with a mental illness, PIP will take greater account of mental, intellectual, cognitive and sensory impairments compared with DLA. The assessment criteria have been developed in collaboration with independent specialists in health, social care and disability, including disabled people and have been extensively consulted on.

Most people will receive a face-to-face consultation with a trained healthcare professional, which will provide a more accurate and consistent assessment of individual need and provide individuals with the opportunity to put across their own views of the impact of their impairment on their everyday lives. Use will also be made of further evidence from the people who provide support such as a GP, consultant, specialist nurse or other health professional.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing Contracts

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development when the contractors, named in his statement to the Assembly on 10 June 2013, were admitted to tender for the Double Glazing Window Framework contracts; and for what reason.

(AQW 26944/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive published a Contract Notice in the Official Journal of the European Union on 21 March 2013 advising that it proposed to establish a Framework Agreement from which contracts would subsequently be awarded to undertake double glazing contracts. The Notice advised potential tenderers that the contract procedure to be used in establishing the Agreement would be the Open Procedure under Regulation 15 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006.

The Open Procedure does not include a pre-qualification or tenderer short listing stage. It is a single stage procedure under which any tenderer may express an interest in a contract, request the Invitation to Tender (ITT) documents and submit a tender via the eSourcing NI Portal in accordance with NI Public Procurement Policy. The closing date for the submission of tenders for this Framework Agreement was 22 April 2013.

Following the evaluation of tenders and the establishment of the Framework Agreement individual contract awards are made following a secondary competition limited to those contractors appointed to the Framework. To date the Housing Executive has not awarded any double glazing contracts under the Framework.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing Contracts

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in regard to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Double Glazing Window Framework contracts, who will make the decision whether reversible windows and hinges or casement windows and hinges will be installed in any given upgrade; and on what basis will such decisions be taken.

(AQW 26945/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that in relation to window replacement, contractors are asked to prepare an outline design for approval on the basis of the contract specifications and relevant code of practice. All design proposals are then presented at a Housing Executive Area Clearance House and a Central Clearing House Meeting and are reviewed and approved according to individual scheme merits and on a value for money basis.

Village, South Belfast: Redevelopment

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the redevelopment of the Village, South Belfast, what commitment he can give that adequate resources will be given to the development of the Amenity Space/Public Park in Phase 3.

(AQW 26946/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The provision of the amenity space/public park is a planning condition of Phase 3 being undertaken by Fold Housing Association. As such it is eligible for funding in the normal way along with all other elements of the social housing scheme. An application for scheme funding has yet to be received from Fold.

Village, South Belfast: Redevelopment

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the redevelopment of the Village, South Belfast, what commitment he can give that any open space, that would not be built on for some years, will be developed and controlled for temporary community use.

(AQW 26947/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Open space created by ongoing redevelopment and not required for the first three phases of development will be grassed by the Housing Executive as an interim measure pending future development for private sector housing.

The Housing Executive, as owner of the land, has confirmed that it is content to engage with the community about potential temporary uses.

Housing Executive: Grass Cutting

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has spent on grass cutting in the South Belfast constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 26967/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information cannot be provided in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not routinely collate data by Parliamentary Constituency. However the Housing Executive has advised that costs for grass cutting in its South Belfast Area Office area for the past three years are detailed in the table below: -

Year	Grass Cutting Cost
2011	£16,153.90
2012	£17,538.52

Year	Grass Cutting Cost
2013	£11,076.96

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Social Housing: South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the planned new social housing developments in the South Belfast constituency.

(AQW 26968/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the schemes for general needs within the South Belfast Constituency contained in the current Social Housing Development Programme.

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Need Group	Number of Units
2013/14			
Apex	Onslow Parade	General Needs	14
Clanmil	137-141 Ormeau Road	General Needs	15
Clanmil	Posnett Street	General Needs	30
Fold	Ravenhill Avenue	General Needs	86
Fold	Village URA	General Needs	27
Fold	Village ATC Rehabs	General Needs	11
Hearth	Rosetta Cottages	General Needs	2
Trinity	London Road	General Needs	15
Trinity	48 Carrington St	General Needs	1
Total 9 schemes / 201 units			
2014/15			
Apex	McClure Street	General Needs	20
Oaklee	Brunswick Street	General Needs	150
Total 2 schemes / 170 units			
2015/16			
Fold	Finaghy Road North	General Needs	109
Total 1 scheme / 109 units			

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Window Replacement Schemes: South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to list the outstanding window replacement schemes in the South Belfast constituency; and when they will be completed.

(AQW 26969/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that its outstanding window replacement schemes for the South Belfast area, as currently programmed are detailed in the table below.

Window Replacement Programme	Number
Lower Woodstock Phase 2	203
Village Non RDA	294
Lisburn Road/Ulsterville	129
Abingdon/Barrington	90
Taughmonagh 1	217

Window Replacement Programme	Number
Taughmonagh 2	176
Upper Ormeau	111
Markets Phase 1	174
Markets Phase 2	179
Donegall Pass	203
Sandy Row Phase 1	150
Sandy Row Phase 2	150
Flush Park	108
Finaghy phase 1	150
Finaghy phase 2	150
Total	2484

The Housing Executive is currently in the process of appointing contractors to deliver this programme and plans to have it completed by the Programme for Government target date of March 2015.

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Housing Executive: Rent Arrears

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the rent arrears that have been written off by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the last five years, broken down by District Office area.

(AQW 27016/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the information by District Office area is only available for 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11. After that, the Housing Executive moved to recording the information by the relevant rent accounting office. The details for both are provided in the tables attached.

Table 1 – By NIHE District Office Area

	Write off as at 31.03.09 £(k)	Write off as at 31.03.10 £(k)	Write off as at 31.03.11 (£k)
Belfast 1	3	10	16
Belfast 2	64	86	33
Belfast 3	5	16	4
Belfast 4	130	70	119
Belfast 5	82	44	42
Belfast 6	41	35	67
Belfast 7	61	54	27
Belfast Area	387	316	308

Bangor	41	32	41
Newtownards	81	31	26
Castlereagh	35	43	81
Lisburn A St	15	55	21
Lisburn Dfarm	28	97	47
Downpatrick	27	26	34
S.E. Area	228	284	250

	Write off as at 31.03.09 £(k)	Write off as at 31.03.10 £(k)	Write off as at 31.03.11 (£k)
Banbridge	11	22	17
Newry	38	50	31
Armagh	28	25	31
Lurgan/B'low	16	25	23
Portadown	21	44	17
Dungannon	30	25	39
Fermanagh	9	21	15
South Area	154	211	173

Ballymena	20	31	12
Antrim	24	15	9
N'abbey 1	36	17	25
N'abbey 2	17	11	27
C'fergus	49	7	11
Larne	27	15	20
Ballycastle	10	9	7
Ballymoney	13	2	6
Coleraine	56	37	3
N.E. Area	252	144	121

Waterloo Pl	2	19	1
Waterside	45	58	19
Collon Tce	33	24	2
Limavady	4	13	20
Magherafelt	18	15	17
Strabane	10	30	12
Omagh	10	16	14
Cookstown	10	6	15
West Area	131	181	100

Table 2 – By Rent Accounting Office

Rent A/Cs Unit	Write off as at 31.03.12 £(k)	Write off as at 31.03.13 £(k)
Belfast	189	504
Lisburn As	42	59
Newtownards	57	226
SE Region Total	99	285

Rent A/Cs Unit	Write off as at 31.03.12 £(k)	Write off as at 31.03.13 £(k)
South	71	191
North East	125	183
Omagh	50	111
West	47	167
West Region Total	97	278

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Housing Council: Repayments

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development how many elected members of the Housing Council are making repayments as a result of an overpayment of rent.

(AQW 27017/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I understand that the Member's question should be how many elected members of the Housing Council are making repayments as a result of an overpayment of housing benefit.

The Housing Executive has advised that the information is not available as they do not hold certain personal data relating to each Housing Council member which would be needed to carry out the appropriate search of housing benefit records

Housing Executive: Contractor Overcharging

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to place in the Assembly Library the documentation, which he relied on to ascertain that the four contractors, that he named in his statement to the Assembly on 10 June 2013, had overcharged the Northern Ireland Housing Executive by £18m.

(AQW 27042/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following a meeting of the Housing Executive Board on 29 May 2013, I met with the Chairman of the Housing Executive who advised me that the Board, at its meeting, had considered the findings of an internal investigation into the matter of overpayments to planned maintenance contractors, which indicated an estimated £18m had been overpaid.

Housing Executive: North Down Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has spent in the North Down constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 27045/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has provided the table below to detail its expenditure in each of the last three years in the North Down constituency.

Type of expenditure	£		
	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	2012/13 £
Capital	1,205,000	713,000	65,000
Response	1,496,000	1,634,000	1,439,000
Planned maintenance	868,000	1,794,000	859,000
New Build	1,432,000	6,854,000	4,447,000
Private Sector Grants	695,000	354,000	420,000
Warm Homes	371,000	378,000	508,000
Supporting People	4,300,000	3,700,000	4,167,000
Total	10,367,000	15,427,000	11,905,000

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Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total amount paid to the Compensation Recovery Unit, including the source of payment, in each of the financial years ending on 31 March (i) 2011; and (ii) 2012.

(AQW 27054/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total amounts paid over to the Compensation Recovery Unit in the financial year ending on 31 March 2011 were £5,042,035 for benefits and £ 9,862,566 for Health Services charges. For the financial year ending on 31 March 2012, the amounts were £5,186,027 for benefits and £10,931,666 for Health Services charges.

The Compensation Recovery Scheme recovers specified Social Security benefits from compensators (generally insurance companies but can also include Government Departments, public bodies and schemes to make compensation payments where drivers are uninsured or untraceable, such as the Motor Insurers' Bureau) where people have received compensation for an accident, injury or disease and who have claimed benefits as a consequence of that accident, injury or disease. Compensation Recovery Unit also recover Health Service charges from those bodies on behalf of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where an injured person avails of ambulance services and/or Health Service treatment following an injury for which compensation is later paid.

Social Housing: Strategic Guidelines

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Social Housing Development Programme Strategic Guidelines and when were they agreed by the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 27059/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The prime purpose of the Strategic Guidelines is to facilitate development and planning of the social housing programme. The guidelines allocate programme share geographically and across a range of client categories. The guidelines are there to ensure that the programme is targeted objectively and distributed through an evidence based approach. They are reviewed annually which allows the Housing Executive to more effectively target both traditional and emerging housing needs.

Also factored into the guidelines are the Housing Executives' strategic objectives - equality, reducing unfitness, promoting social inclusion and programmes based on need.

Currently, and as a result of the introduction of new policies and strategies, the allocation of the programme is split into four categories; General Needs, Rural Housing, Supported Housing, and Travellers Housing.

For 2013/14, general needs housing has been identified as requiring 68.1% of the programme, rural housing requires 10.0%, supported housing requires 21.5% and travellers housing requires 0.4%.

The Strategic Guidelines are reviewed annually and are approved by the Housing Executive each October.

Social Housing: North Belfast, West Belfast and Londonderry

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development when the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive approved the policy of ring fencing in relation to the construction of social housing for (i) North Belfast; (ii) West Belfast; and (iii) Londonderry.

(AQW 27061/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive approved its Londonderry Strategy in 1999. This identified a need for 120 new dwellings per annum in the West Bank. The decision to ring fence this number became operative as part of the Strategic Guidelines review in 1999/00.

The Housing Executive approved its North Belfast Strategy in 2000. This identified a need for 250 new dwellings per annum. The decision to ring fence this number became operative as part of the Strategic Guidelines review in 2001/02.

The Housing Executive approved its West Belfast Strategy in 2003. This identified a need for 275 new dwellings per annum. The decision to ring fence this number became operative as part of the Strategic Guidelines review in 2003/04.

Social Housing: North Belfast, West Belfast and Londonderry

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development when and why the policy of ring fencing social housing building was terminated for (i) North Belfast; (ii) West Belfast; and (iii) Londonderry.

(AQW 27062/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The concept of ring fencing to the formulation of the social housing programme through the Strategic Guidelines was introduced by the Housing Executive in the 1990's, prior to the introduction of the 2000 equality legislation in Northern Ireland. Ring Fencing was one of the mechanisms used for distributing the programme and directed scarce new social housing into areas of particularly acute housing need.

Sectoral studies and strategies for North Belfast, West Belfast and Londonderry had identified these areas as requiring special consideration because of the chronic need in these areas.

However, in the context of more limited funding, this approach, which was sound when high levels of need were concentrated in the Belfast and Londonderry areas, did not recognise sufficiently the huge growth in housing need which was dispersed throughout Northern Ireland - in particular in Lisburn, Newry and Ballymena.

The Housing Executive therefore applied an Equality Impact Assessment to the Strategic Guidelines in 2007/08 and as a result the 'ring fencing' was removed in 2008/09.

Social Housing: Strategic Guidelines EQIA

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) when and why the Northern Ireland Housing Executive completed an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the Social Housing Development Programme Strategic Guidelines; (ii) when the draft EQIA was published; and (iii) when the EQIA was published.

(AQW 27063/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following an initial screening of all its housing policies, the Housing Executive determined that Strategic Guidelines was amongst a group of policies requiring EQIA. Strategic Guidelines were subsequently programmed as the last of a series of EQIA's and scheduled for Year 5 of the equality scheme timetable.

The first draft EQIA on the Strategic Guidelines was sent out for consultation in September 2008. After an elongated consultation period the final document was approved by the Housing Executive in December 2009. The results were published on the Housing Executive's website in October 2010.

The second draft EQIA was sent out for consultation in October 2010. The final document was approved by the Housing Executive in April 2011. The results were published on the Housing Executive's website in June 2011.

DSD: Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to promote inclusion and provision for people with a disability.

(AQW 27072/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department's Disability Action Plan 2011- 2013 (DAP) can be found on the Department's website. My Department provides an annual update on progress to the Equality Commission, which sets out action measures carried out in relation to the implementation of the DAP.

The Department is currently undertaking a Five Year Review of its Disability Action Plans, and working on its Disability Action Plan for 2013-15. Consultation will then provide additional opportunities to engage with people with disabilities and the organisations representing them.

Housing Executive: Gas Installation in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive areas in Bangor will have gas installed over the next twelve months.

(AQW 27084/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that in the next twelve months they will install gas heating in the following areas in Bangor:-

- Rathgill & Willowbrook – 32 dwellings
- Kilcooley – 36 dwellings
- Groomsport – 13 dwellings
- Conlig – 5 dwellings

The Housing Executive will also replace a small number of 15 year old oil systems and gas back-boiler units during 2014/15 but these are still to be programmed.

Housing Executive Stock: Double Glazing and Thermal Efficiency

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his Department's progress to fulfil the Programme for Government 2011-2015 commitment to improve thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in its properties.

(AQW 27100/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there are around 14,800 of its dwellings that still require double glazing work. The Housing Executive is currently in the process of appointing contactors to deliver the double glazing programme and intend to have this completed by the Programme for Government target date of March 2015.

Housing Executive: Gas Installation in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive areas in Holywood will have domestic gas installed over the next twelve months.

(AQW 27107/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that in the next twelve months they will install gas heating systems in the following areas of Holywood:-

- Loughview – 24 dwellings
- Redburn – 5 dwellings
- Spencer Street/ Strand Avenue – 3 dwellings

The Housing Executive will also replace a small number of 15 year old oil systems and gas back- boiler units during 2014/15, but these are still to be programmed.

Soft Services

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26787/11-15, to detail (i) the total number of redundancies that will result from the decision to outsource the Soft Services function; (ii) the location of each office that delivers Soft Services function; and (iii) the number of redundancies in each office.

(AQW 27129/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No redundancies are anticipated as a result of the planned outsourcing exercise. The nature of soft facilities management services means that each of the Department for Social Development's 66 locations across Northern Ireland will be impacted to some extent.

Welfare Reform

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action's recent publication The Impact of Welfare Reform on Northern Ireland.

(AQW 27131/11-15)

Mr McCausland: While I welcome any report which contributes to our understanding of the impact of Welfare Reform on Northern Ireland, I am concerned about reports which claim to be focused on welfare reform but which only serve to cause concern. Social security benefit spending in Northern Ireland is projected to increase from £5.5 billion in 2013/2014 to around £6.3 billion by 2018 and it is therefore inaccurate to say that social security spending in Northern Ireland is going to be reduced by £750 million.

It is generally accepted that Welfare Reform relates to the Welfare Reform Bill currently being considered by the Assembly. This report does not focus on the implications of the Welfare Reform Bill rather it is more concerned with how the coalition government is managing the increase in expenditure on the social security and tax benefit systems.

Over a third of monies claimed in this report to be disappearing from the Northern Ireland economy have never actually been in anyone's pockets. The report focuses on the 1% cap and changes to tax credits but does not point out that this is money which has never been in the local economy.

The report also focuses on reforms that have been largely implemented, a number of which were introduced by the previous Labour government and others which are focused on controlling expenditure as part of the normal budgetary cycle.

The positive aspects of the changes to the benefit and tax credit systems of helping people into work and to beat the benefit trap, such as Universal Credit and its impact, are ignored.

I have met with the Chief Executive of NICVA, Seamus McAleavey and the current Chair, Marie Cavanagh, CEO of Gingerbread NI to discuss these concerns further.

Twaddell Avenue

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps his Department has taken to protect itself from claims of financial loss resulting from the occupation of its property on Twaddell Avenue.

(AQW 27136/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The site at Twaddell Avenue is owned by the Housing Executive who advise that it is surplus to their requirements and has been on the open market 18 months prior to it being occupied. To date there has been no offers. The Housing Executive does not anticipate any claims of financial loss resulting from the occupation of the site and they are continuing to liaise closely with the Police Service NI on issues relating to this matter.

Anne Street, Dungannon

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department is prepared to lead a multi-agency initiative to consider the obstacles to the full development of Anne Street, Dungannon, given that no single agency has full responsibility for the overall development of this site.

(AQW 27148/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As my Department has responsibility for town centre regeneration and owns a large portion of land in this area, I am happy for my Department to take the lead in bringing together key partners including business representatives to work on a collaborative basis to explore the issues and identify actions for the economic development and regeneration potential for the Anne Street area of Dungannon.

Social Housing: 2010 Funding

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Social Development what area of Londonderry was subject to the policy ring-fencing funding for social housing in 2010.

(AQW 27149/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive applied an Equality Impact Assessment on the Strategic Guidelines in 2007/8 from which the concept of ring fencing was introduced. As a consequence of this ring fencing was removed in 2008/9. Therefore, no area of Londonderry was subject to the policy ring fencing funding for social housing in 2010.

Social Housing Development Programme Strategic Guidelines

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the differences between the Social Housing Development Programme Strategic Guidelines (a) before the 2008 Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA); (b) after the 2008 EQIA; and (c) after the 2010 EQIA.

(AQW 27161/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

Pre 2008 EQIA

The concept of ring fencing to the formulation of the social housing programme through the Strategic Guidelines was introduced by the Housing Executive in the 1990's, prior to the introduction of the 2000 equality legislation in Northern Ireland. Ring Fencing was one of the mechanisms used for distributing the programme and directed scarce new social housing into areas of particularly acute housing need.

Sectoral studies and strategies for North Belfast, West Belfast and Londonderry had identified these areas as requiring special consideration because of the chronic need in these areas.

2008 EQIA

However, in the context of more limited funding, this approach, which was sound when high levels of need were concentrated in the Belfast and Londonderry areas, did not recognise sufficiently the huge growth in housing need which was dispersed throughout Northern Ireland - in particular in Lisburn, Newry and Ballymena.

The Housing Executive therefore applied an Equality Impact Assessment to the Strategic Guidelines in 2007/08 and given that the ring fencing was creating an imbalance to the detriment of the rest of Northern Ireland, it was removed in 2008/09.

2010 EQIA

As a result of increasing levels of housing stress and limited funding for new build, in 2009 the Housing Executive examined whether or not the new build programme was being directed at those areas of greatest housing need. The result was more focus being given to areas with the highest number of applicants in housing stress, highest points levels and those waiting longest to be housed. This new approach was applied to the strategic guidelines resulting in a change of policy. This in turn required the Housing Executive to carry out another EQIA on the Strategic Guidelines.

The impact of the 2010 EQIA was a re-distribution of the programme to those areas demonstrating the most intense housing need.

North West Regional Science Park

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any expressions of interest he has received from companies wishing to locate in the North West Regional Science Park.

(AQW 27182/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Expressions of interest will be made directly to the Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP) rather than my Department. NISP and Letterkenny Institute of Technology are currently liaising with Invest NI and the IDA Ireland to raise the profile of the project to secure tenants. The target is to have 70% occupancy at Fort George by Year 5 after the practical completion date of 2014.

Social Fund Crisis Loan Service

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26352/11-15, how he plans to remedy the large number of calls which go unanswered to the Crisis Loans Tele Claims Service.

(AQW 27209/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Fund Crisis Loan Service is primarily a face to face service delivered at the front office and in addition, a limited telephone service is provided to support this service. The Agency recognises that the telephone service is constrained and requires modernisation and, as part of Welfare Reform, a programme of investment is underway which is due for completion next year. This new service will significantly improve the telephony service offered. Claimants who cannot currently access the Crisis Loan telephony should call into their local office.

Crisis Loan Telephone Service

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26352/11-15, to detail the measures he is taking to improve the Crisis Loan telephone service; and whether he will implement measurable targets for unanswered calls at each Jobs and Benefits office.

(AQW 27240/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Fund Crisis Loan Service is primarily a face to face service delivered at the front office and in addition, a limited telephone service is provided to support this service. The Agency recognises that the current telephone service is constrained and requires modernisation and, as part of Welfare Reform, a programme of investment is underway which is due for completion next year. This new service will significantly improve the telephony service offered. As part of the modernisation the Agency is also reviewing its performance indicators in relation to the newly established telephony centres. Claimants who cannot currently access the Crisis Loan telephony should call into their local office.

Housing Executive Properties: Gas Installation

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans there are to install domestic gas into Housing Executive properties in Millisle.

(AQW 27279/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advise that all its properties in Millisle currently have oil heating with the exception of those where tenants have chosen to keep their existing solid fuel or Economy 7 systems.

In line with Housing Executive policy, oil heating systems will be replaced as they reach the end of their useful life (after 15 years) and, at that stage, gas heating will be installed where gas is available. However, gas is currently only available in parts of Millisle and outside of those areas existing systems will be replaced with a new oil system. The Housing Executive will continue to replace any remaining solid fuel or Economy 7 systems at change of tenancy or as the system fails.

Benefit Fraud: Prosecutions

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for benefit fraud over the last three years.

(AQW 27284/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested for each of the last three years is set out in the following table:

Year ending 31st March	Number prosecuted
2013	*570
2012	*527
2011	*549

The figures above refer to the number of people prosecuted and not the number of convictions.

* The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The production and dissemination of all Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Queen's Parade, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queens Parade project, Bangor.

(AQW 27378/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Earlier this year, I announced that my Department had stepped in and purchased a significant portfolio of land along Queen's Parade, Bangor as private sector plans to develop the area had stalled. Since then my Department has established a Project Board to oversee the comprehensive development of the site and attain planning approval for the development. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and North Down Borough Council has been agreed. This is a major regeneration project and it will take in the region of 18 months to assemble all the land needed and attain planning approval.

Welfare Reform Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development if he intends to bring the Welfare Reform Bill to the Assembly for consideration stage; and whether he will ensure any amendments he intends to make to the Bill will be submitted to the Bill Office at least two weeks prior to the introduction of the Bill for scrutiny by the Assembly.

(AQW 27409/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I fully intend to bring the Welfare Reform Bill back to this Assembly for Consideration Stage as soon as there is the political consensus to do so. Members will be aware that I have been discussing various measures with Executive colleagues with a view to offsetting some of the more negative aspects of the reform agenda.

The timing of Consideration stage and the scheduling of same is a matter for the Assembly Business Office and it would be my intention that Members have adequate time to consider tabled amendments in advance of Consideration Stage for the Bill.

Soft Services: Function

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26787/11-15, why efficiencies cannot be achieved within the current model.

(AQW 27433/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development when deciding to outsource its Soft Services considered a number of options, one of which was using the current model. The decision to outsource was an operational one driven by a need to achieve efficiencies and the most economically advantageous option providing the greatest efficiencies was selected.

Housing Executive: Update

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the verification of the alleged overcharging by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive contractors named in his statement to the Assembly on 10 June 2013.

(AQO 4861/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised me that they are continuing to work with the contractors and the appointed experts to agree the additional work necessary to enable a final estimate to be produced. The contractors have been supportive and both parties are committed to bring this matter to a conclusion as soon as possible.

Social Housing Development Programme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development how the current Social Housing Development Programme will meet the needs of future provision for supported housing.

(AQO 4865/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Programme for Government 2011-2015 includes a commitment to deliver 6000 new social homes, of which 850 are supported housing, and 2000 affordable new homes over this period.

259 Supported Housing units have been delivered in the first two years and it is anticipated a further 390 Supported units will be delivered in the last two years. Whilst this suggests a shortfall of 201 on the four year target, the full re-settlement target for the mental health and learning disability client groups will be met.

The current Social Housing Development Programme for 2013/14 includes 28 schemes totalling 334 units to deliver the Supported Housing Programme. Some of these schemes however may not achieve a start on site this year due to acquisition and planning difficulties.

The Supported Housing Programme reflects the needs analysis as identified by the Health and Social Care Trusts. A new Social Housing and Development Programme for the three year period 2014/15 – 2016/17 is currently being formulated and subject to approval will be published in January 2014.

Personal Independence Payments

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development whether savings would be made by the gradual removal of Disability Living Allowance from people of working age, and the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment.

(AQO 4859/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Once the Welfare Reform bill and supporting regulations are passed by the Assembly, Personal Independence Payment, which is replacing Disability Living Allowance for people aged 16-64, will be introduced on a gradual basis beginning with new claims. Existing Disability Living Allowance recipients whose award has an end date or where they report a change in their care or mobility needs, will at the same time, be invited to claim Personal Independence Payment.

For the vast majority of the existing 118,000 working age Disability Living Allowance recipients, the reassessment process will not start until October 2015 at the earliest and is expected to be completed by March 2018.

Given this incremental approach and based on an anticipated October 2013 start date, my Department earlier in the year published information on the impacts of Personal Independence Payment up to October 2015 which indicated that there would be a projected annual saving of just over £30 million for the expected cohort of people who would undergo reassessment up

to October 2015. It is extremely important to remember that this is a forecast and each person will be individually assessed. Due to the slippage in the Welfare Reform Bill these forecasts will now need to be revised.

No forecasts have been published for the period beyond October 2015 as the Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria will be the subject of two independent reviews, the first completing in December 2014. These findings need to be fully considered, and any necessary changes made to the current criteria and assent process before the majority of Disability Living Allowance recipients begin to be reassessed from October 2015.

Town Centre Regeneration

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development what progress his Department has made, in conjunction with other Departments, in implementing the recommendations set out in the Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration (14/09/10R) conducted by the Committee for Social Development.

(AQO 4860/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Committee for Social Development's 'Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration Report' was published in October 2009. It made a number of recommendations focusing on the areas of; policy, monitoring and effectiveness, the roles of councils and town centre bodies, practical support for councils and stakeholders and supporting town centre development.

The Department advised that several of the recommendations were outside of its remit but accepted the majority. The Committee was updated last year on progress against these. A number of significant achievements to date include:

- The publication of the Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework and the priority given therein to supporting the competitiveness of our towns and cities;
- The commencement of work to establish a set of Key Performance Indicators for town centres;
- The introduction of legislation and support for Business Improvement Districts;
- The roll-out of the Town Centre Master Planning process which addresses many of the Committee's concerns about the capture of information about dereliction in town centres and the inclusion of decent affordable housing in town centre regeneration plans; and
- The progress under the Reform of Local Government which will see the extension of powers and budgets to the 11 new councils coupled with Community Planning powers.

In addition I published the DSD High Street Taskforce Report earlier this year which not only set out a number of recommendations for the Department but also highlighted the main issues for other Departments which I brought to the Executive sub-committee on the Economy for consideration.

Social Housing: Mixed Tenure

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department can encourage housing associations to have mixed tenure developments, such as co-ownership or equity share and social housing.

(AQO 4862/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland: Facing the Future, outlines a number of proposals for moving forward that can encourage the advancement of mixed tenure developments in the future. These include:

- Increasing access to affordable housing;
- Developing further innovation in the funding of new social housing;
- Maintaining pathways into affordable home ownership for social housing tenants;
- Bringing more empty homes back into use;
- Taking a housing-led approach to regenerating communities experiencing blight, dereliction or decline; and
- Supporting town and city centre regeneration through a revitalised Living Over the Shops initiative.

My officials are already advancing a number of these proposals and have been engaging with the Housing Association movement to maximise the delivery of social and affordable homes, and the opportunities to do so in the future.

Social Housing: Welfare Reform

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his strategy for the future provision of social housing in the context of the challenges posed by the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQO 4863/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are approximately 32,000 social housing tenants potentially affected by under-occupation restrictions. However, I am currently frustrated in dealing with these proposals. I cannot discuss at this time any details of the package which has been suggested following discussions with the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Minister of Finance.

One channel to help meet the need is through re-lets of existing social housing stock. To facilitate those wishing to downsize, the Housing Executive has consulted on amendments to the Housing Selection Scheme enacted with the introduction of

welfare reform in Northern Ireland, giving priority status to tenants under-occupying their property and who wish to transfer to a suitable dwelling.

Other options available include tenants exchanging homes with others who have a tenancy through the exchange scheme. Landlords can carry out a search for potential properties to swap through the Homeswapper initiative. In addition my Department is actively encouraging and supporting the inclusion of one bed accommodation within new build proposals.

I have instructed that Housing Associations should bring forward 200 singles units each year from 2013/14 and for the Housing Executive to prepare a new draft Social Housing Development Programme by December 2013 and that this should aim to deliver a minimum of 600 one bed units across the three year programme.

Duke Street, Ballymacarrett: Roof Repairs

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the work scheduled for the roofs of the owner-occupied homes in Duke Street, Ballymacarrett.

(AQO 4864/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is proposing to carry out re-roofing works to ten Housing Executive properties and four privately owned properties in Duke Street and the neighbouring area. The properties will be re-roofed with metal tiles to provide enhanced protection.

The Housing Executive's Procurement Unit and Belfast Property Services met last week to finalise the contract details for tendering of the work.

Help-to-buy Scheme

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider allocating additional financial assistance to the Co-Ownership Scheme to enable applicants to take advantage of the recently announced Help to Buy scheme.

(AQO 4852/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The recently announced Help to Buy Mortgage Guarantee is not available to homes purchased under shared equity schemes, such as Co-Ownership, as these schemes already receive government funding to support the purchase of affordable homes.

However, I am delighted that the Scheme has been launched, as it should help give many more local people an opportunity to enter the housing market and the net benefit of this across the local economy should be a welcome boost.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Software Licences

Mr B McCrea asked the Assembly Commission to detail the total cost of software licences, such as Microsoft Office, in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 26620/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Information Systems Office currently manages a very large number of individual software licences for use by Assembly Members and Secretariat staff. This encompasses a wide variety of licensing agreements with a large number of external suppliers.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission purchases all Microsoft software product licences under a discounted volume licensing arrangement called the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement. Under the current Public Sector Agreement 2012 (PSA12), negotiated between Microsoft and the UK Government Procurement Service (GPS), the NI Assembly receives significantly discounted pricing arrangements for Microsoft software products. The total costs for Microsoft Office Professional software licences are detailed below. These costs are inclusive of "Software Assurance" which provides automatic upgrades to the latest versions of Microsoft Office software as well as a range of other services such as 24 x 7 software telephone / web support and on-site training and consultancy advice.

Year	No. of licences	Total cost
2011-2012	700	£33,936.00
2012-2013	700	£33,936.00
2013-2014	940	£51,059.00

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.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Revised Written Answers

Department for Employment and Learning

In this Bound Volume, page WA 299, please replace AQW 26594/11-15 with:

South West College: Beacon Centre

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 25524/11-15, why South West Regional College delivered provision for young people leaving special schools through the Beacon Centre, which predominately deals with mental health issues.

(AQW 26594/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): In my response, I inadvertently stated that South West College (SWC) provided part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the Dungannon campus, in conjunction with the Beacon Centre.

The correct response is that SWC does not deliver provision to young people leaving special schools through Beacon Centres.

As I stated in AQW 25524/11-15, during the 2012/13 academic year, SWC provided a range of part-time courses for adults with mental health issues at the Dungannon campus, in conjunction with the Beacon Centre. SWC considered that this type of provision was not appropriate for young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities leaving special schools.

Please accept my apologies for any confusion caused.

I am copying this letter to the Business office and the Assembly Library.

Department for Social Development

In this Bound Volume, page WA 267, please replace AQW 26478/11-15 with:

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been placed in the work-related activity group since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26478/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): At May 2013, there were 25,050 Employment and Support Allowance claimants in the Work Related Activity Group.

The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency.

The information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 267, please replace AQW 26479/11-15 with:

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been placed in the Support Group category since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 26479/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): At May 2013, there were 28,750 Employment and Support Allowance claimants in the Support Group category.

The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency.

The information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 267, please replace AQW 26479/11-15 with:

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Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): At May 2013, there were 28,750 Employment and Support Allowance claimants in the Support Group category.

The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency.

The information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 140, please replace AQW 26502/11-15 with:

Housing: Help-to-buy Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development by what means will local people be able to access the Help to Buy scheme.
(AQW 26502/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Next week the Help to Buy Mortgage Guarantee Scheme, announced by the Chancellor in Budget 2013, will be available for applications. This scheme will see the Government and lenders guaranteeing up to 15 per cent of a property's value and will allow potential buyers to purchase a home with a 5% deposit and the balance covered by a mortgage.

Several high street banks, including RBS and Lloyds Banking Group, will be offering the new Help to Buy mortgages to customers, ranging from 80 to 95% of the property's value. These mortgages will be on a repayment basis and borrowers will be subject to the usual affordability and income verification checks normally conducted by lenders to ensure they can afford the mortgage they are applying for.

Details of the lenders who will be offering the Help to Buy mortgages will be published next week and those wishing to avail of these products will be able to apply through the relevant banks.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 140, please replace AQW 26502/11-15 with:

Housing: Help-to-buy Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development by what means will local people be able to access the Help to Buy scheme.
(AQW 26502/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Next week the Help to Buy Mortgage Guarantee Scheme, announced by the Chancellor in Budget 2013, will be available for applications. This scheme will see the Government and lenders guaranteeing up to 15 per cent of a property's value and will allow potential buyers to purchase a home with a 5% deposit and the balance covered by a mortgage.

Several high street banks, including RBS and Lloyds Banking Group, will be offering the new Help to Buy mortgages to customers, ranging from 80 to 95% of the property's value. These mortgages will be on a repayment basis and borrowers will be subject to the usual affordability and income verification checks normally conducted by lenders to ensure they can afford the mortgage they are applying for.

Details of the lenders who will be offering the Help to Buy mortgages will be published next week and those wishing to avail of these products will be able to apply through the relevant banks.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 495, please replace AQW 27059/11-15 with:

Social Housing: Strategic Guidelines

Ms Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Social Housing Development Programme Strategic Guidelines and when were they agreed by the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 27059/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The prime purpose of the Strategic Guidelines is to facilitate development and planning of the social housing programme. The guidelines allocate programme share geographically and across a range of client categories. The guidelines are there to ensure that the programme is targeted objectively and distributed through an evidence based approach. They are reviewed annually which allows the Housing Executive to more effectively target both traditional and emerging housing needs.

Also factored into the guidelines are the Housing Executives' strategic objectives - equality, reducing unfitness, promoting social inclusion and programmes based on need.

Currently, and as a result of the introduction of new policies and strategies, the allocation of the programme is split into four categories; General Needs, Rural Housing, Supported Housing, and Travellers Housing.

For 2013/14, general needs housing has been identified as requiring 68.1% of the programme, rural housing requires 10.0%, supported housing requires 21.5% and travellers housing requires 0.4%.

The Strategic Guidelines are reviewed annually and are approved by the Housing Executive each October.

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 30 September 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Deputy Chairperson Nomination

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that the Speaker had received the resignation of Mr Kieran McCarthy as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The Speaker had also received the nomination of Ms Anna Lo as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges with effect from 30 September 2013. The Principal Deputy Speaker confirmed the appointment.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mrs Dolores Kelly replace Mr Mark H Durkan as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr Fearghal McKinney be appointed as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

*Mr P Ramsey
Mrs K McKeivitt*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement – Fundamental Review of GCSEs and A Levels

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding the Fundamental Review of GCSEs and A Levels, following which he replied to questions.

4.2 Motion – The draft Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: The Financial Provisions Bill (NIA Bill 22/11-15)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 December 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Financial Provisions Bill (NIA Bill 22/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for Finance and Personnel

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion - Exploitation of Children and Young People

Proposed:

This this Assembly notes with concern the recent revelations regarding the abuse and exploitation of children and young people; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to liaise with the Minister of Justice to initiate an inquiry to ascertain the prevalence of abuse and exploitation of children both in care and elsewhere; and further calls on all relevant Departments to outline the strategies that will be put in place to safeguard and protect children and young people in care.

Ms M McLaughlin

Mr M Brady

Ms C Ruane

6.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'protect' and insert:

'all children and young people.'

Mr R Beggs

Mrs S Overend

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

7. Question Time

7.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

7.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

8. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion - Exploitation of Children and Young People

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **carried** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion as amended was **carried** without division.

8.2 Motion - Farm Safety Investment Scheme

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the number of fatalities and injuries on farms; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to build upon the good work of the Farm Safety Partnership by, as a matter of urgency, providing adequate funding for a farm safety investment scheme to help protect people working on farms and encourage real and practical investment in farm safety.

Mr P Frew

Mr T Buchanan

Miss M McIlveen

Mr W Irwin

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

9. Adjournment

Mr Mickey Brady spoke to his topic regarding the Newry Southern Relief Road.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.53pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

30 September 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 25 – 30 September 2013

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

Report on NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight (NIA131/11-15)

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/ Draft The Pharmacy (1976 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)

S. R. 2013/223 The Education (Student Support) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DEL)

S. R. 2013/224 The Goods Vehicles (Community Licence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)

S. R. 2013/225 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Workers Prohibition) and Fitness of Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)

S. R. 2013/229 The Contaminants in Food Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/226 The Waiting Restrictions (Holywood) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/227 The Cycle Routes (Amendment No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/228 The One-Way Traffic (Carrickfergus) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/230 The Waiting Restrictions (Dungannon) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Bright Start: The Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare (A Strategy Framework and Keys First Actions)

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Department for Social Development Business Plan 2013/14 (DSD)

Northern Ireland Audit Office Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre (DFP)

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Disposal and Retention Schedule May 2013 (DSD)

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Tuairisc Bhliantúil 2012/13 (DE)

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Resource Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2013 (DARD)

Charitable Donations and Bequests Annual Report to 31 March 2013 (DSD)

Report on an announced inspection of Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre 18-22 February 2013 (DOJ)

Report on an announced inspection of Ash House, Hydebank Wood Women's Prison, 18-22 February 2013 (DOJ)

Consultative Document: Proposals for the Control of Major Accident Hazards (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DETI)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 1 October 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Kieran McCarthy replace Mr Stewart Dickson as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mr Stewart Dickson replace Mrs Judith Cochrane as a member of the Committee for Social Development; that Mr Trevor Lunn replace Mr Kieran McCarthy as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; that Mr Trevor Lunn replace Mr Stewart Dickson as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; and that Mr Kieran McCarthy replace Mr Chris Lyttle as a member of the Committee on Procedures.

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Second Stage - Local Government Bill (NIA 28/11-15)

The Minister of the Environment moved the Second Stage of the Local Government Bill (NIA 28/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

4.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

5. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Second Stage - Local Government Bill (NIA 28/11-15)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Local Government Bill (NIA 28/11-15) passed Second Stage (Division).

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.09pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

1 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

1 October 2013

Division

Second Stage - Local Government Bill (NIA 28/11-15)

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 64

Noes: 12

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Ms J McCann, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Elliott and Mr Kinahan.

The Second Stage was **agreed**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 1 October 2013

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

S. R. 2013/232 The Lisburn Road, Ballynahinch (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/231 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles)(Amendment No.5) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Public Consultation on Policy Options Arising from the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (Pillar I Direct Payments) (DARD)

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 2 October 2013

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13					
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13					
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13					
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13					
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13					

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	12.11.13					
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13						

2011-2015 Mandate**Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	12.11.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 7 October 2013

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 – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Alex Attwood replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Fearghal McKinney replace Mr Alban Maginness as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Alban Maginness replace Mrs Dolores Kelly as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Joe Byrne replace Mrs Dolores Kelly as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; and that Mr Alex Attwood be appointed as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

*Mr P Ramsey
Mrs K McKeivitt*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: The Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 27/11-15)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 11 December 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 27/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - Town Centre Strategy

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the ongoing pressures on small businesses, in particular, those in the retail sector; notes the current and forthcoming policies and programmes in relation to business rates, planning, Business Improvement Districts, public transport, the development of shared space and urban regeneration; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to produce an overarching strategy for town centres, high streets and urban villages to ensure the effective co-ordination of the current and future initiatives.

Mrs J Cochrane

Mr S Dickson

Mr K McCarthy

4.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'regeneration;' and insert:

'further notes that the majority of local authorities have extensive town centre plans; and calls on the Minister for Social Development and the Executive to enable these plans by utilising all the funding mechanisms at their disposal.'

Mrs D Kelly

Mr D Bradley

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **carried** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended was **carried** without division.

4.3 Motion - Practices of Car Parking Companies

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the practices of some car parking companies and how they operate; questions the adequacy of signage both on parking times and penalties, as well as the quantum, nature, content and design of penalty demands, the threat of legal action and the absence of appeals mechanisms; believes that we need a more robust code of practice for enforcement and more effective regulation by the British Parking Association; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to meet with the Secretary of State for Transport to outline these concerns.

Mr P Frew

Ms P Brown

Mr P Weir

Debate ensued

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Practices of Car Parking Companies

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) 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 4.21pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

7 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 2 – 7 October 2013

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

Legislative Consent Memorandum - UK Intellectual Property Bill- Freedom of Information Provisions (OFMDFM)

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division Annual Report on Decision Making 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 (DSD)

Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Care Bill (DHSSPS)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/233 The Frederick Street, Belfast (Footpath)(Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/234 The C338 (unnamed road), Moneymore, Newry (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013(DRD)

S. R. 2013/239 The Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOJ)

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/235 The Waiting Restrictions (Belmont Road, Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS)

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation - Ground-mounted solar PV above 250Kw (DETI)

Consultation on Implementation of Electricity and Gas Metering and Billing Provisions of the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU) (DETI)

9. Departmental Publications

Learning to Learn A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning October 2013 (DE)

Northern Ireland Audit Office DoE Planning: Review of Counter Fraud Arrangements (DFP)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 8 October 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 **Public Petition – Establishment of Cross-Border Area Learning Community to Provide Post-Primary Education in North & West Fermanagh**

Mr Phil Flanagan was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding the establishment of Cross-Border Area Learning Community to Provide Post-Primary Education in North & West Fermanagh.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 **Motion – The 'Undocumented' and Immigration Reform in the United States**

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the large number of people who have emigrated from across the island of Ireland to make a new life in America; notes the positive influence that Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants have had on the political, social, cultural and economic success of the United States of America; further notes with deep concern the continuing hardships endured by the 'undocumented' in America; welcomes the bipartisan approach taken by American politicians to deal with the issue of immigration reform; and supports the call for the introduction of legislation to deal with immigration reform, including a pathway to citizenship for the 'undocumented'.

Mr P Flanagan

Mr C Boylan

Mr B McElduff

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion – Privatisation of Royal Mail

Proposed:

That this Assembly considers Royal Mail to be a vital public service; notes with concern the added costs to Northern Ireland businesses and consumers if the universal service obligation and uniform pricing are withdrawn as a result of privatisation, which could result in reductions in the wages of the lowest paid workers and other multiple negative impacts on prices, services and standards, including the future provision of rural postal services critical for isolated communities, the elderly and other rural dwellers; and calls on the Coalition Government to abandon its proposals.

*Mr A Attwood
Mr S Agnew
Mr J Dallat
Mr P McGlone*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 12.30pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

4.2 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. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.29pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

8 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 8 October 2013

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

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
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11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 9 October 2013

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13					
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13					
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13					
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13					
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13					

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	12.11.13					
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	19.11.13					

2011-2015 Mandate**Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	12.11.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 October 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Murders and Security Alerts

Mr Tom Elliott made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the recent murders and security alerts. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – Public Consultation on the Future Delivery of Consumer Representation in Northern Ireland

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the Public Consultation on the Future Delivery of Consumer Representation in Northern Ireland, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

3.2 Legislative Consent Motion – Intellectual Property Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in clause 13 of the Intellectual Property Bill, as introduced in the House of Lords on 9 May 2013, dealing with the offence of unauthorised copying etc, of design in the course of business, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.3 Motion – Draft Pharmacy (1976 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Pharmacy (1976 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

The Minister not being in place, the Motion was deemed to have fallen.

The sitting was, by leave, suspended at 1.06pm.

The sitting resumed at 1.09pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: Local Government Bill (NIA Bill 28/11-15)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 20 February 2014, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Extension of the Local Government Bill (NIA Bill 28/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for the Environment

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – Public Consultation

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that public consultation is an important component of Government policy formulation and decision making; recognises that it can strengthen links between Government and the public and, particularly, the community and voluntary sector; expresses concern at the disparity in costs associated with consultation across Government Departments; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to define best practice.

*Mr M Nesbitt
Mr D Kinahan*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

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 First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Bell, also answered a number of questions.

6.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan.

7. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

7.1 Blood Donations: Judicial Review

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Kieran McCarthy.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

8. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion – Bowel Cancer

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of early diagnosis of bowel cancer in saving lives; commends the success of the existing screening programme; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider extending the age range that can access screening to incorporate a larger proportion of the population.

*Mr J Spratt
Mr J Wells
Mr G Dunne
Ms P Brown*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.10pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

14 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 9 - 14 October 2013

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 Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2013 (OFMDFM)

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service - Trust Statement 2011/12 (DOJ)

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2012 – 2013 (OFMDFM)

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Legislative Consent Motion to modernise existing legislation to safeguard copying of registered designs through the introduction of the Intellectual Property Bill (Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment) (NIA 129/11-15)

Report on the Legislative Consent Motion which extends to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Energy Bill dealing with Power Sector Decarbonisation thus enabling a 2030 power sector decarbonisation target for the electricity sector in subordinate legislation (Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment) (NIA 130/11-15)

Report on Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Management of Major Capital Projects (Public Accounts Committee) (NIA 136/11-15)

Report on the Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15) (Committee for Health Social Services and Public Safety) (NIA 137/11-15)

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/240 The Shore Road, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/236 The Train Driving Licences and Certificates (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/237 The Railways (Safety Management) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/243 The Automatic Enrolment (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD)

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Publication of Revised Draft PPS 15 – Planning & Flood Risk (DOE)

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Future Arrangements for Consumer Representation in Northern Ireland (DETI)

- 10. Agency Publications
- 11. Westminster Publications
- 12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 October 2013

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 – Fraud Awareness

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding Fraud Awareness, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – Prison Review Reports

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the findings contained in the Criminal Justice Inspection's Reports on Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre; notes that the Owers review highlighted most of the issues raised in these Reports; and calls on the Minister of Justice to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Prison Reform Programme is progressed in the manner envisaged by the Prison Review Team's report.

Mr R McCartney

Ms R McCorley

Mr S Lynch

3.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Minister of Justice' and insert:

'to review the implementation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme to ensure support from all relevant stakeholders taking forward the reform programme.'

Mr P Givan

Mr J Wells

Mr W Humphrey

Mr S Anderson

3.3 Amendment 2**Proposed:**

Insert after 'steps to ensure that':

'the performance of the senior administration of the Northern Ireland Prison Service is sufficient and that'

Mr T Elliott

Mr R Hussey

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, Amendment No. 1 was **made** without division.

Amendment No. 2 was not put.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

4. Question Time**4.1 Finance and Personnel**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton.

4.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)**5.1 Motion – National Crime Agency****Proposed:**

That this Assembly recognises the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's ability to protect life under Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and to tackle serious crime, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking; and will work to ensure that no further delays are allowed to impact on the work of the NCA being extended to Northern Ireland.

Mr D McIlveen

Mr W Humphrey

Mr A Ross

Ms J Wells

5.2 Amendment 1**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'notes the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's relationship with some other serious and organised crime agencies; further notes the statement made on behalf of the PSNI at the launch of the Policing Board Annual Report in January 2013 that the NCA must operate in an accountable manner through the Policing Board; regrets that the Home Secretary has failed to bring forward proposals that would allow the NCA to operate as such and calls on the Minister of Justice and Home Secretary to urgently introduce statutory amendments which would guarantee that the NCA and its operations in Northern Ireland are fully accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.'

Mrs D Kelly

Mr A Maginness

Mr A Attwood

Mr P McGlone

5.3 Amendment 2**Proposed:**

Leave out all after the second 'trafficking;' and insert:

'and calls on Her Majesty's Government to implement the legislative requirements to enable the NCA to operate fully in Northern Ireland.'

Mr T Elliott

Mr R Hussey

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, Amendment No. 1 **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, Amendment No. 2 **fell** (Division 2).

The Question being put, the Motion, was **carried** (Division 3).

6. Adjournment

Mr Roy Beggs spoke to his topic regarding response policing in Larne.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.31pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

15 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 October 2013

Division 1

Motion: National Crime Agency – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'notes the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's relationship with some other serious and organised crime agencies; further notes the statement made on behalf of the PSNI at the launch of the Policing Board Annual Report in January 2013 that the NCA must operate in an accountable manner through the Policing Board; regrets that the Home Secretary has failed to bring forward proposals that would allow the NCA to operate as such and calls on the Minister of Justice and Home Secretary to urgently introduce statutory amendments which would guarantee that the NCA and its operations in Northern Ireland are fully accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.'

Mrs D Kelly

Mr A Maginness

Mr A Attwood

Mr P McGlone

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 49

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr G Kelly and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 October 2013

Division 2

Motion: National Crime Agency – Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after the second 'trafficking;' and insert:

'and calls on Her Majesty's Government to implement the legislative requirements to enable the NCA to operate fully in Northern Ireland.'

Mr T Elliott

Mr R Hussey

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 42

Noes: 45

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr McCarthy

The Amendment **fell**

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 October 2013

Division 3

Motion: National Crime Agency

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the concerns raised by the Chief Constable, that failure to establish the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland will impact on the PSNI's ability to protect life under Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and to tackle serious crime, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking; and will work to ensure that no further delays are allowed to impact on the work of the NCA being extended to Northern Ireland.

*Mr D McIlveen
Mr W Humphrey
Mr A Ross
Ms J Wells*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 49

Noes: 38

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr G Kelly and Mr McKinney.

The Motion was **agreed**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 15 October 2013

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

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/238 The Local Government (Boundaries) (2008 Act) (Commencement, Transitional Provision and Savings) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)

S. R. 2013/242 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Magherafelt) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 16 October 2013

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13					
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13					
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13					
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13					
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13					

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	12.11.13					
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14					

2011-2015 Mandate**Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	12.11.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 21 October 2013

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 – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin replace Ms Sue Ramsey as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Ms C Ruane

Mr G Kelly

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – Public Expenditure: 2013-14 October Monitoring Round and 2014-15 Capital Reallocation Exercise

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, made a statement regarding Public Expenditure: 2013-14 October Monitoring Round and 2014-15 Capital Reallocation Exercise, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

3.2 Statement – Second Anniversary of the Owers Report on Prison Reform

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Second Anniversary of the Owers Report on Prison Reform, following which he replied to questions.

Questions to the Minister of Justice were suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

4.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Statement – Second Anniversary of the Owers Report on Prison Reform

Questions resumed on the statement.

5.2 Motion: Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion – Job Creation

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at InvestNI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs created as a result of government intervention; notes the absence of any InvestNI-facilitated visits to some constituencies in recent years, by potential foreign direct investors; welcomes the Programme for Government 2011/15 commitment to address regional imbalance; and calls on the Executive to publish an action plan outlining how it intends to meet these commitments.

Mr P Flanagan

Ms M McLaughlin

6.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'publish' and insert:

'an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs.'

Mr P McGlone

Mr F McKinney

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 2).

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.49pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

21 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

22 October 2013

Division 1

Motion – Job Creation – Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'publish' and insert:

'an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs.'

Mr P McGlone

Mr F McKinney

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 49

Noes: 33

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKevitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

22 October 2013

Division 2

Motion – Job Creation

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at InvestNI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs created as a result of government intervention; notes the absence of any InvestNI-facilitated visits to some constituencies in recent years, by potential foreign direct investors; welcomes the Programme for Government 2011/15 commitment to address regional imbalance; and calls on the Executive to publish an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs.

Mr P Flanagan

Ms M McLaughlin

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 49

Noes: 33

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Ms Maeve McLaughlin.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion, as amended was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 16 -21 October 2013

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

S.R. 2013/241 The Waste (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)

S.R. 2013/244 The African Horse Sickness Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD)

S.R. 2013/245 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No.6) Order (Northern Ireland) (DOE)

S.R. 2013/246 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Organ Donation (DHSSPS)

Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation (DRD)

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Law Commission Records NI Retention and Disposal Schedule 2013 -2015 (DCAL)

Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland Records Management Policy and Retention and Disposal Schedule June 2013 (DCAL)

WELB Record Retention and Disposal Schedule Northern Ireland Education and Library Board Model Schedule (DCAL)

Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards Retention and Disposal of Records Schedule April 2013 (DCAL)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 22 October 2013

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 – Advancing Shared Education

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding Advancing Shared Education, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – Planning Bill

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark Durkan, made a statement regarding the Planning Bill, following which he replied to questions.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) 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 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 Legislative Consent Motion – Energy Bill (Decarbonisation Provisions)

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Energy Bill dealing with Power Sector Decarbonisation, as contained in Part 1 of the Energy Bill, as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Lords.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – The Use of the Social Investment Model in Tackling Social Issues

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the growing use of the social investment model to tackle a variety of long-standing and extensive social issues; recognises its value in pioneering new approaches and techniques that produce better results for people, shifting risk away from the public sector and only paying on results; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine how such a model could be applied to contracts to help tackle a range of social issues.

Mr P Girvan

Mr P Weir

Mr P Frew

Mr G Dunne

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion – Review of the North South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Co-operation

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the Review of the North South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Co-operation that has been ongoing since 2007; expresses its disappointment and frustration that the Review has not concluded its work more than six years after it started; believes that the expansion of areas of co-operation and implementation across economic, social, educational, health, environmental and other areas serves the interests of the people of the island of Ireland; further notes that the July 2013 North South Ministerial Council agreed that the Review recommendations should be presented to its December 2013 meeting; and urges that there is no further slippage in concluding the Review and that its recommendations are actioned urgently.

Mr A Attwood

Dr A McDonnell

Mrs D Kelly

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion, was **carried** (Division 1).

6. Adjournment

Mr Dominic Bradley spoke to his topic regarding the future of Armagh Gaol.

The Speaker took the Chair.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.26pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

22 October 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

22 October 2013

Division 1

Motion – Review of the North South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Co-operation

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the Review of the North South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Co-operation that has been ongoing since 2007; expresses its disappointment and frustration that the Review has not concluded its work more than six years after it started; believes that the expansion of areas of co-operation and implementation across economic, social, educational, health, environmental and other areas serves the interests of the people of the island of Ireland; further notes that the July 2013 North South Ministerial Council agreed that the Review recommendations should be presented to its December 2013 meeting; and urges that there is no further slippage in concluding the Review and that its recommendations are actioned urgently.

*Mr A Attwood
Dr A McDonnell
Mrs D Kelly*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 32

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Moutray and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 22 October 2013

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 Financial Accuracy 1 January to 31 December 2012 (DSD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
For Information Only:
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 23 October 2013

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13				
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13					
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13					
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13					
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13					

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	12.11.13					
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14					

2011-2015 Mandate**Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	12.11.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.