

Assembly Questions

AQW 45171/11-15

Mr Peter Weir (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reserves held by Translink in each of the last five years; and how much of these reserves were spent in each of the last five years.

28/04/2015

Translink reserves as recorded in the NITHC consolidated balance sheet at the end of the financial years in question were:

31/03/14 £25,026k

31/03/13 £20,735k

25/03/12 £19,004k

27/03/11 £35,667k

29/03/10 £ (8,559k)

The reserves figure represents the value of the business at the year-end, as distinct from the cash balances or net current assets of the business. The value of the reserves reflects the trading results of the company each year and accounting adjustments.

AQW 44875/11-15

Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what is the scale of cuts, in both actual and percentage terms, being implemented in his Department's budget in 2015/16, specifying the level of cut in each programme.

22/04/2015

My Department has had to manage cuts and pressures of some £60 million on Non Ring-Fenced Resource DEL budget, around 18% of the 2014-15 baseline as part of 2015 Budget.

The table below shows how I have allocated my 2015-16 Budget to business areas, the pressures as a result of the cuts in Budget 2015 and the percentage pressure against the Opening Baselines within each area of my Department.

Budget 2015-16 Non Ring Fenced Resource Allocations:

Business Area (Programme)	Opening Baseline 2015-16 £m	Pressures £m	Pressure on 2015-16 Opening Baseline %
TransportNI	139.5	38.5	27.6
Translink	61.0	13.0	21.3
NI Water	109.2	4.7	4.3
Other Elements within Department	23.4	4.0	17.1
EU Funds	0.5	-	-

Total	333.6	60.2	18.0
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For details specifying the level and impact of cuts in each programme I would refer you to three recent AQW's (AQ44441/11-15, AQ44443/11-15 and AQ 44444/11-15) asked by Mr Easton MLA (North Down) for which I provided answers on 24 April 2015. These can be accessed via the following link: <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/search.aspx> (see below)

AQW 44444/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what is the shortfall in the budget for Transport NI for the next financial year.

13/04/2015

My Department is facing cuts and pressures of some £60 million on my Resource budget, around 18% of the 2014-15 baseline.

The total shortfall in the Budget for TransportNI is some £38.5million. In addressing this pressure, the TransportNI budget has limited room for flexibility. After taking into account inescapable costs totalling almost £84 million, including £40 million for PPP commitments, together with staff costs of some £61 million, TransportNI has only £13m to cover all remaining activities.

These include street lighting and traffic signal energy, funding for external contractors including those who normally repair traffic signals and street lights, supplies including patching materials and salt, fleet maintenance and fuel. Indeed the £13 million will only cover the street lighting and traffic signal energy costs and inspections.

As a result, I would have been unable to carry out routine maintenance work and street lighting repairs in 2015-16.

The stopping of these activities is likely to have serious public safety implications. In addition, around 500 industrial staff employed by my Department would be confined to depots with no work due to the budget position. This situation would be totally unacceptable.

I am, therefore, proposing to allow my industrial staff to provide a skeleton routine maintenance service, until the outcome of June monitoring is known. Let me make it clear that this will be done at risk and I will be keeping the position under careful review.

AQW 44443/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what is the shortfall in the budget for Translink for the next financial year.

13/04/2015

My Department is facing cuts and pressures of some £60 million on my Resource budget, around 18% of the 2014-15 baseline.

The draft Budget left Translink facing pressures of £15 million. Out of additional funding provided at Final Budget, I have allocated an additional £2 million to Translink for town services reducing their budget shortfall to £13million for 2015-16.

While Translink is undertaking a number of actions in order to reduce its funding pressures, it is forecasting an increase in its in-year deficit, bringing the total projected loss to £10.8million in 2015-16.

Although the network will continue to operate on its current geographical basis, it is inevitable, given the funding constraints, that there will be reductions in frequency to some services. However, in taking forward any proposed service rationalisation, Translink is consulting with passengers, local community representatives, politicians and other stakeholders.

AQW 44441/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what is the shortfall in the budget for NI Water for the next financial year.

13/04/2015

My Department is facing cuts and pressures of some £60 million on my Resource budget, around 18% of the 2014-15 baseline.

NI Water is subject to significant statutory duties as a company and water and sewerage undertaker. It also has to certify to the Regulator that it has sufficient funding to carry out its regulated activities. The Draft Budget left NI Water with a shortfall of some £15 million. The Draft Budget position would have made it virtually impossible for the company to comply with its legal duties and obligations under the Licence. To enable NI Water to meet its legal obligations, I have significantly addressed this shortfall through the allocation of a further £10 million, bringing its Resource allocation to £109.2 million for 2015-16.

A significant risk remains, however. NI Water is still £4.7 million short of the funding level recommended by the Utility Regulator and was therefore unable to accept the Final Determination. It will need to absorb this shortfall and there is no funding to cover unforeseen events.

AQO 7860/11-15

Mr Daithí McKay (SF - North Antrim) To ask the Minister for Regional Development to outline the budget allocations for road maintenance in each of the four divisions of TransportNI in 2015/16.

12/03/2015

My Department is facing a £60 million Resource budgetary pressure for 2015/16, more than half of which will fall to TransportNI. This budget pressure will create an immediate impact on the delivery of routine maintenance services such as gully cleaning, road marking and street light repairs, together with road and footway patching winter service, grass cutting and the maintenance of traffic signals.

The budget allocation that is currently available to TransportNI is only sufficient to cover our fixed costs, such as PPP payments and staff costs, energy bills for street lighting and traffic signals and statutory inspection and testing of street lighting installations.

No budget is available to allocate to external contractors to carry out gully cleaning, road marking, street light repairs and other routine maintenance activities from 1 April 2015.

Consequently, my Department will not be able to employ external contractors to undertake these routine activities beyond 31 March 2015.

I am likely to authorise a very limited amount of work by to my internal workforce to provide a skeletal routine maintenance service until June 2015. However, can I make it clear that I am doing so at risk, as I cannot allow road safety related maintenance to be stopped.

In 2015/16 TransportNI will be entirely dependent upon funding allocations from monitoring rounds to deliver the full range of maintenance activities beyond June 2015, including those provided by our internal workforce.

AQW 43452/11-15

Mr Seán Lynch (SF - Fermanagh and South Tyrone) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what budget has been set aside in the next financial year for (i) gully cleaning; (ii) road marking; and (iii) street lighting in each TransportNI division.

09/03/2015

My Department is facing a £60 million Resource budgetary pressure for 2015/16, more than half of which will fall to TransportNI. This budget pressure will create an immediate impact on the delivery of routine maintenance services such as gully cleaning, road marking and street light repairs, together with road and footway patching winter service, grass cutting and the maintenance of traffic signals.

The budget allocation that is currently available to TransportNI is only sufficient to cover our fixed costs, such as PPP payments and staff costs, energy bills for street lighting and traffic signals and statutory inspection and testing of street lighting installations.

No budget is available to allocate to external contractors to carry out gully cleaning, road marking, street light repairs and other routine maintenance activities from 1 April 2015.

Consequently, my Department will not be able to employ external contractors to undertake these routine activities beyond 31 March 2015.

I am likely to authorise a very limited amount of work by my internal workforce to provide a skeleton routine maintenance service until June 2015. However, can I make it clear that I am doing so at risk, as I cannot allow road safety related maintenance to be stopped.

In 2015/16 TransportNI will be entirely dependent upon funding allocations from monitoring rounds to deliver the full range of maintenance activities beyond June 2015, including those provided by our internal workforce.

AQW 43135/11-15

Mr Patsy McGlone (SDLP - Mid Ulster) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what value of construction work, to be funded from the capital budget, his Department will start in the 2015/16 financial year.

03/03/2015

I can advise that £132 million, funded from the capital budget, has been identified to be spent on construction work starting in the 2015-16 financial year. However, I would also advise that as the business areas within my Department are still working on the detail of their budget allocations this figure is subject to change.

AQW 43134/11-15

Mr Patsy McGlone (SDLP - Mid Ulster) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what value of construction work, to be funded from the resource budget, his Department will start in the 2015/16 financial year.

03/03/2015

I can advise that £12.8m, funded from the resource budget, has been identified to be spent on construction work starting in the 2015/16 financial year. However, I would also advise that as the

business areas within my Department are still working on the detail of their budget allocations this figure is subject to change.

AQW 43042/11-15

Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP - Strangford) To ask the Minister for Regional Development which town bus services will receive support from the £5m allocation in the Budget 2015-16.

02/03/2015

Translink faced an initial funding cut of £15m however I have been able to invest additional monies received in the final budget to safeguard the existence of all town services in 2015-16. The bus network will be retained. Nevertheless there will still be the need for Translink to make efficiencies in administration and overhead costs, to review the frequency of some services.

Translink will be consulting locally on the detail of this.

AQW 43029/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to alleviate the shortfall in NI Waters budget for 2015/16.

02/03/2015

Through its work on the Price Control process, the Utility Regulator assesses the revenue requirements of NI Water. The Draft Budget allocation for NI Water Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) was £99.2 million. As a result of the consultation process I have moved to alleviate the consequential shortfall of close to £15 million by allocating an additional £10 million to NI Water's Resource DEL allocation. Whilst this does not provide the full Public Expenditure (PE) funding which my Department has assessed as necessary to support the Regulator's Final Determination, it has significantly narrowed the funding gap. However, as a result I have had to reduce PE allocation from other Departmental Business Areas.

Work will still be needed to assess changes to outputs required of NI Water because funding is not at the level required by the Regulator. My Department will work closely with NI Water and the Utility Regulator to ensure the regulatory environment which provides sustainable high quality water and sewerage services to the public is maintained.

AQW 42996/11-15

Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the implications of the reclassification of Northern Ireland Water as a Non-Departmental Public Body for his budget in each financial year since the reclassification; (ii) the depreciation and capital non-cash costs and what pressures this has placed on his departmental budget in each financial year; and (iii) whether the non-cash costs impacted on the Department's cash provision; and if so, how much in each financial year.

27/02/2015

In response to (i) and (ii) the table below shows the DEL budget costs recorded in the Departmental budget as a result of the reclassification of Northern Ireland Water in 2008/09 as a Non-Departmental Public Body.

Depreciation and capital non-cash figures shown in italics for 2008/09 and 2009/10 were treated in line with Public Expenditure budgetary guidance at that time as AME budget, not DEL, and are included for comparison purposes only. From 2010/11 Departments were no longer required to calculate and report capital non-cash costs in budgets.

In relation to (iii) there was no non-cash impact on the Department's cash provision during the financial years reported.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimated
DEL Cash Resource	145,537	131,990	123,776	96,733	108,780	99,220	99,049
DEL Cash Capital	388,905	253,840	158,462	188,440	160,211	164,651	154,437
Total DEL Cash	534,442	385,830	282,238	285,173	268,991	263,871	253,486
DEL Non-Cash (depreciation)	51,649	61,517	42,696	50,332	59,561	62,105	62,166
DEL Non-Cash (Cost of Capital)	38,321	44,338	0	0	0	0	0
Total DEL Non-Cash	89,970	105,855	42,696	50,332	59,561	62,105	62,166
	624,412	491,685	324,934	335,505	328,552	325,976	315,652

AQW 42373/11-15

Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development to detail the ratio of spending on roads compared to public transport in each year of the 2011-15 Budget; and that which is planned for the 2015-16 Budget.

Hide answer

The ratio of spending on roads compared to public transport in each year of the 2011-15 Budget and that for 2015-16 is shown in the table below. The 2014-15 ratio is based on projected spend to the end of the financial year and the 2015-16 ratio is based on the Final Budget.

Ratio	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Roads	64	68	76	77	65
Transport	36	32	24	23	35

The above exclude non cash spend.

AQW 41625/11-15

Mr Chris Hazzard (SF - South Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what monies are included for his Department in the final 2015/16 budget; and how this will impact upon funding for Translink town services.

02/02/2015

The Final Budget provided my Department with £333.6 million non-ring fenced resource and £328.3 million Capital. However, as you will be aware substantial cuts have been enforced across all departments through the Budget 2015-16 settlement. In the case of my own Department we are facing non-ring fenced Resource DEL pressures in the region of £65 million, around 19% of my Department's non ring fenced DEL. This makes the task of maintaining public transport services a very difficult one, particularly when balanced against maintaining other essential services provided by my Department and its ALBs, including water, sewerage, street lighting and road maintenance, all of which have considerable implications for public health and safety.

The additional £5 million allocation provided in the Final Budget for 'town bus services and road repair programmes' is a welcome one and will considerably ease the impact on town services across Northern Ireland.

AQW 41515/11-15

Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI - East Belfast) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what is meant by the term 'income generating options for NI Water' in his Budget 2015-16.

29/01/2015

As part of the 2015-16 Budget Consultation process my Department requested that NI Water assess the impact of operating with substantially less funding than indicated through the Price Control process. I asked the Company to consider all options which could potentially reduce that gap including additional savings and increasing their income stream from current activities and charging levels. I would clarify that this would not involve the implementation of water charges for domestic customers which the Executive has decided to continue to defer.

AQW 41405/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development in light of the additional money awarded in the Budget 2015-16, whether his Department is now in a position to repair all malfunctioning street lights.

28/01/2015

Following the Executive's decision to meet my Department's bid for additional funding in the January monitoring round, I immediately reinstated the use of external contractors to repair defective street lights. Contractors are back on the ground, in addition to my Department's own street lighting staff, working through the backlog of street lighting repairs that has accumulated since last August. I have instructed that all available resources are to be used to expedite the work. My aim is to have the backlog cleared as quickly as possible within the remainder of this financial year.

However, the funding provided for street lighting repairs in January monitoring is for this financial year only and there has been no additional money awarded in the 2015/16 budget to maintain this level of service. In order to avoid a similar situation occurring next financial year, I have alerted Executive colleagues to the need for an adequate road maintenance budget, including for street lighting repairs.

I will continue to bid for adequate resources to keep street lighting operating, but ultimately my Department will not be able to spend money it does not have.

AQW 41065/11-15

Mr Trevor Lunn (APNI - Lagan Valley) To ask the Minister for Regional Development for the percentage of his Department's overall Current Resource Expenditure allocated to staff wages in (i) 2013/14; and (ii) the 2014/15 draft budget.

21/01/2015

Staff wages as a percentage of Current Resource Expenditure is provided in the table below:

	2013-14	2014-15
Salaries and wages as a percentage of current resource expenditure	15.5%	16.8%

The salaries and wages percentage for 2013-14 is based on the final outturn for 2013-14 and the percentage for 2014-15 is based on the final budget plan for 2014-15.

AQW 40906/11-15

Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI - East Belfast) To ask the Minister for Regional Development whether he anticipates an overspend in his departmental budget for 2014/15; and if so, by how much.

19/01/2015

The Department's budget was set, as part of Budget 2011-15, by the then Executive, in the expectation that £20 million of income would be secured from Belfast Harbour Commissioners in both 2013-14 and 2014-15. However, while the Harbour has agreed to undertake £41.5 million of Release of Value projects and is progressing these projects, there is no means of crediting this investment to my Department's budget.

The Budget Review Group recommended that the Executive should provide the necessary funding for the £20 million Release of Value receipt from Belfast Harbour Commissioners through in-year monitoring this financial year 2014/15. The Executive had provided the required £20 million budget allocation to my Department in 2013/14 in recognition of the position in that year.

I have consistently made it clear at each monitoring round and in letters to the Finance Minister that the Department cannot absorb this £20 million pressure in 2014/15, but the funding has not been provided.

I have identified some £7.0 million to go towards the Release of Value pressure, though this is not without risk. The remaining £13 million could only be achieved through service reductions which would damage core services severely and have an impact on public safety. These include stopping winter service and stopping all routine road maintenance. As a consequence I issued my Accounting Officer with a direction to continue to provide such services.

My Department received an additional Resource allocation of £5.2 million from the Executive in January Monitoring, with the stipulation that funding should be used specifically on street lighting repairs and roads and bridge operations and maintenance, it should not be offset against the Release of Value pressure. As such the potential overspend remains at £13 million although I will continue to seek measures to reduce this figure.

AQW 40670/11-15

Mr Trevor Clarke (DUP - South Antrim) To ask the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the recent budget cuts, what plans he has to cut senior posts within Translink.

14/01/2015

The Departmental budget consultation document stated that as part of a package of measures to address cuts in Translink subsidies in 2015/2016 that efficiency savings can be made. This included reference to early reductions in senior and middle management levels and reductions in areas of general administrative expenditure. I want to see this being taken forward as we deal with the challenging final Budget outcome.

AQW 40628/11-15

Mr Seán Rogers (SDLP - South Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development, given the intent of the Assembly to oppose water charges and his recent budgetary restraints, whether he plans to order NI Water to stop the installation of water meters with immediate effect.

13/01/2015

Under Article 81 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, NI Water is required to install meters on properties being connected to the public water supply for the first time. This requirement relates to both new domestic properties and existing properties obtaining first time water services.

It is my intention to amend this legislation through the forthcoming Water Bill. I have asked my officials to take a power in the Bill to make Regulations in order to allow Article 81 to be amended. The Committee for Regional Development has been advised about my proposal and the Executive approved it on 15 January.

AQW 40401/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development how much has been cut from his Department's capital budget for the remainder of the financial year.

08/01/2015

My Department has not had any cuts made to the capital budget for the remainder of the financial year.

AQW 40400/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what impact the cut to the NI Water budget will have on service provision.

08/01/2015

NI Water has worked to manage the funding gap in its DEL Resource operational cost budget in 2014/15 whilst seeking not to impact its core services. Cost-cutting measures have been taken across a large range of areas within the company, many of which are one-off in nature and are not without risk, including assuming a normal winter period.

NI Water will continue to actively mitigate any risk of failure of service but this will remain a challenge within its current DEL Resource budget. Negative impact on customers due to increased risk of out of sewer flooding, pollution events, increased leakage, clean water supply interruptions, and overall longer response times cannot be ruled out.

Going forward, it is not likely to be sustainable for NI Water to operate at the same reduced budget level.

AQW 40399/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development how much has been cut from the NI Water budget for the remainder of the financial year.

08/01/2015

As NI Water had to manage a total funding gap of £14.4m in its 2014/15 budget allocation, which included a £4.2m shortfall against the Utility Regulator's Price Control (PC13) final determination, it was decided that there should be no further reduction to the NI Water budget for the remainder of the financial year.

AQW 40363/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what impact the cut to the TransportNI budget will have on service provision.

07/01/2015

There has been a significant cut to the TransportNI budget for 2014-15 which amounts to £6 million. In addition the baseline is £12 million less than the objective requirement for roads maintenance. This has been addressed through in-year monitoring in each of the last three years. As a consequence I took a number of decisions to ensure a level of service could continue to be delivered to the public by protecting TransportNI's essential services –

- Winter Maintenance;
- Energy costs for Street Lights, Traffic Signs & Signals;
- Inspection & testing and associated safety repairs of the Street Lighting, & illuminated signs stock; and
- Maintenance of traffic signals.

I also chose to protect TransportNI's internal maintenance teams, this was to ensure a minimum level of service could be delivered for the public to deal with public safety issues such as prioritised street lighting outages, ensuring sight lines have their grass cut, the most at risk gullies are emptied to moderate the risk of flooding and only the most significant defects on the road network can be patched. However all Resource DEL work with external contractors, unless associated with the protected activities detailed above, was ceased; in reality this has meant –

- The vast majority of street lights, where small scale maintenance, e.g. replacing a light-bulb was required, had been left unrepaired.
- Minimal maintenance was being completed on bridges;
- Only the most hazardous defects on roads and footways were being fixed; though every effort was being taken to carry out the Departments statutory duty to maintain the road network,
- The majority of gullies were un-cleaned or the frequency of cleaning was reduced.
- Very few road markings were being renewed. Priority is given to regulatory / safety related markings such as STOP & Give Way markings.

The allocation of £5.2 million provided in January Monitoring will of course help to mitigate the impact of the cuts on the above services. The additional funding element for roads and bridge maintenance (£3.2 million) will be spent on a wide range of functions including gully emptying, renewal of road markings, bridge maintenance patching and some safety fence repairs. In relation to the street lighting allocation (£2 million), this will be used fix the backlog of outages and the outages that occur from now until the end of the year.

AQW 40362/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development how much has been cut from the TransportNI budget for the remainder of the financial year.

07/01/2015

A budget cut of £6.0m Resource DEL was applied to TransportNI's budget this year as part of my Department's £15 million budget cut to address the 4.4% reduction applied to my Department's budget baseline. In addition the baseline is £12 million less than the objective requirement for roads maintenance. This has been addressed through in-year monitoring in each of the last three years. I have detailed the impact of these budget reductions in my response to AQW 40363/11-15

AQW 40361/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development what impact the cut to the NI Railways budget will have on service provision.

07/01/2015

I can advise you that the reduction in funding from Government to the NI Railways budget 2014-15 is not expected to have an impact on services; rather the deficit is expected to be absorbed by the Translink group by increasing the level of expected trading loss for the current year.

However, my Department has issued a consultation paper in response to draft budgets which are proposed from 2015/16 onwards. Depending on the final budget provisions for 2015/16, Translink will then be in a position to firm up plans to meet the new funding landscape. It is possible that the frequency of some rail services will be impacted.

AQW 40360/11-15

Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down) To ask the Minister for Regional Development how much has been cut from the NI Railways budget for the remainder of the financial year.

07/01/2015

I can advise you that over the current financial year 2014-15 I have planned a reduction in resource funding to the NI Railways budget as originally set out of £6 million.

This is subject to the outcome of January monitoring.

Winter Service Programme

9 December 2014

2. Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development how his departmental budgetary pressures will impact on the winter service programme. (AQO 7261/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has delivered £15 million of resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) to meet the 4.4% budget reduction agreed by the Executive in 2014-15. These cuts were addressed through a number of savings measures including a series of measures to reduce my Department's administration spend; reductions in funding to Translink; stopping external contractors' work on routine road maintenance, including patching, grass cutting and gully emptying; and suspending the use of external contractors for the repair of street lights that fail, unless they pose an electrical hazard to the public.

However, a number of pressures remain within my Department, the largest being the £20 million pressure in respect of the release of value from Belfast Harbour Commissioners. My Department's budget was set, as part of Budget 2011-15, by the then Executive on the basis that £20 million of income would be secured from Belfast Harbour Commissioners in both 2013-14 and 2014-15. The Budget review group subsequently agreed that the Department should work collaboratively with Belfast Harbour Commissioners on release-of-value projects. While the Harbour has agreed to undertake £41.5 million of release-of-value projects and is progressing these, there is no means of crediting this investment to my Department's budget. The Executive agreed that the shortfall should be addressed through in-year monitoring, and this was the case in 2013-14 when the Executive allocated £20 million to my Department during the year.

In September 2014, the Budget review group recommended that the Executive take the same steps. They have not yet done so, with my bids for the £20 million in June and October monitoring being unsuccessful. I am conscious of time, but this is important, so I claim your indulgence, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. The next stage of resource measures available to me would involve cutting core front-line services, including some £3 million of funding for winter service activities. These measures directly affect public safety, including no gritting or snow clearing. I am simply not prepared to put the public at risk by stopping such services.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am sure that many, including my constituents, know that the Minister is committed to provision of those winter services. Does he agree with me that Simon Hamilton should know better than to seek to apply pressure to the budget over the port's reserves for what appear to many to be party political reasons?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. I hope and trust that politics is not being played with anybody's budget. Quite frankly, these matters are too important, and winter services are an essential part of the services that DRD provides.

We are engaging with the Department of Finance and Personnel. I made my concern clear to Mr Hamilton and the entire Executive. Nobody should underestimate this. There are clear implications not only for the DRD budget but potentially for an Executive overspend. Surely no one will want to be in that situation, because it will reflect badly on all of us, I suspect. I very much hope that people will not play politics and that we can restore this budget and ensure that the level of service that we would seek — that I would want to provide — can, indeed, be provided.

Mr G Robinson: We have had a very mild winter so far and hopefully savings can be made. Will salt boxes still be provided to rural communities — to farmers, schools etc — along with other road services?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I can confirm that in spite of the pressures on me, and given what I said, we will continue to provide winter services. Whilst the early part of winter has perhaps been a little bit milder, I am aware, and the Member will be aware, of weather warnings about wind speeds this evening.

We are now approaching the hard section of winter. Nevertheless, we continue to put out the grit boxes and grit piles — some 50,000 grit piles and approximately 4,800 salt bins — and we will continue to salt the main network. But I respectfully say to the Member that if he wants to assist me properly, he does need to speak to his party colleague, the Finance Minister, and Executive colleagues to encourage them to plug the gap that is currently in my budget.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is it still possible for farmers and other interested parties in rural areas to apply to DRD for contracts to clear rural roads affected during harsh weather?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. There is ongoing provision for farmers and other such contractors to register to give assistance. We have to use in the best possible way the limited resources available to us. We will deal as sympathetically as possible with emergency cases that require attention, such as funerals etc.

Arrangements are in place to bring farmers and contractors in to assist with the clearance of snow from local roads. Of course, we have salt bins and 50,000 grit piles. The Member will know, living in a rural community, how important self-help is to assist particularly the elderly and those not able to carry out such functions. I encourage people to continue to do that and work together at community level.

Mr McNarry: The Minister says he will not put the public at risk, and we are greatly relieved to hear that. How much money has he set aside for compensation liability claims due to failing maintenance and public roads not being properly fit for the road user?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question.

There is, as yet, no evidence of increased claims against the Department as a result of the savings and the cutbacks that we have been forced to make.

The Member, through his membership of the Committee for Regional Development, has been critical of some of the actions that I have been forced to take. I repeat: I have been forced to take them. He also offered a solution by saying that we would somehow find moneys by using the resources of Translink. We have attempted to use every resource available to us; we have forensically looked at our budget, and we continue to do so. However, you cannot make savings on the scale of those imposed without their having an impact.

I am glad to say that that has not led to an increase in public claims of liability, and we will continue to challenge and contest such claims, case by case. I do not want to hear Members coming to the House with crocodile tears, airing concerns that they are not prepared to support in other places.

AQW 37311/11-15

Mrs Judith Cochrane (APNI - East Belfast) To ask the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 6788/11-15, to detail (i) whether he is confident that internal contractors have the appropriate specialist skills and equipment to adequately fill the void left by external contractors; (ii) what efforts have been made to upskill internal contractors and acquire the additional equipment necessary to adequately address public safety concerns; (iii) the criteria that has to be met before external contractors are employed in the absence of appropriate specialist skills and equipment being available from internal resources; and (iv) to what extent it is appropriate for public safety concerns to be disregarded in the context of budgetary cuts.

09/10/2014

My Department's Operations & Maintenance workforce has the resources to cover around 75% of routine maintenance activities and 25% of street lighting repairs. Whilst this does not completely fill the void left by external contractors, they will endeavour to keep the road network as safe as possible. I can confirm that operatives have the specialist skills and equipment necessary to carry out the additional maintenance work it has had to undertake. Where necessary, specialist equipment has been redeployed and training provided in-house to fully accredited standards. In exceptional circumstances, where Operations & Maintenance staff do not have the skills or equipment available, external contractors may be employed to deal with emergency situations, or where there is a risk to public safety

I can assure the Member that public safety concerns are not disregarded by my Department. In order to deal with the health and safety implications, I have established priorities which take account of the budgets I have available.

AQW 37193/11-15

Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI - East Belfast) To ask the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the current extent of compliance with the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and the EU Water Framework Directive; (ii) the current extent of the risk of infraction proceedings commencing; (iii) the level of fines possible as a result of this infraction; and (iv) the level of investment needed to avoid such proceedings.

08/10/2014

The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive protects the environment from the adverse effects of sewage discharges. It sets treatment levels on the basis of sizes of sewage discharges and the sensitivity of waters receiving the discharges. There are 79 wastewater treatment works (WWTW) in Northern Ireland assessed for compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD). All sites, except Ballycastle WWTW and Benone WWTW complied with UWWTD requirements resulting in a compliance rate in 2013 of 98%.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires member states to implement measures to prevent deterioration of the status of all bodies of surface water and groundwater and to protect, enhance and restore all water bodies with the aim of achieving "good" status by 2015. This is achieved through the production and implementation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for each River Basin District (RBD) which set out the measures through which improvements in the water environment can be achieved across a six-year cycle. The first set of RBMPs was submitted to the European Commission in 2009 with the second set of RBMPs due in 2015. The first formal classification of water bodies under WFD will not take place until 2015 and thus no assessments have been performed yet in terms of the extent of compliance. The implementation and reporting of compliance with the WFD is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment (DOE).

The European Commission has commenced infraction proceedings against the UK Government in respect of Ballycastle WWTW as the works does not have secondary treatment in place. NI Water has begun a capital works project to deliver an upgrade at Ballycastle to meet the UWWTD requirements. Progress on this upgrade is being monitored by the European Commission. The Benone WWTW failed to meet the required standards in 2013 and has been decommissioned. A new works at Magilligan, which serves the Benone area as well, was opened in 2014.

With regard to compliance with the WFD, DOE is due to report to the European Commission in 2015 on progress of the delivery of the Programme of Measures for the first River Basin Planning Cycle of the WFD. An infraction risk is likely to arise in respect of Belfast Harbour water quality, where monitoring to date suggests that the required standard will not be met. In response to this risk, a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure plan is being developed for Northern Ireland and the first phase will focus on South and East Belfast. One of the key aims of this phase is to deliver improvements in the water quality in Belfast Harbour. It is likely that this initiative would be taken into account by the European Commission when it determines whether or not to commence infraction proceedings, and subsequently if it were to consider the imposition of fines by way of enforcement.

Article 9 of the WFD requires Member States to take account of the principle of recovery of the costs of water services and requires Member States by 2010 to have water-pricing policies that provide adequate incentives for users to use water resources efficiently. Although Northern Ireland has charges for non-domestic water users the absence of charges for domestic users could represent an infraction risk.

(iii) The Commission has powers to apply financial sanctions to the UK where, following infraction proceedings for a breach of EU law, the Court of Justice has found the UK to be in breach of its obligations. The level of infraction fine in an individual case is difficult to assess as it will be determined by the seriousness and duration of the breach. Although infraction proceedings may commence, in most cases in the UK to date it has been possible to avoid financial penalties through committing to a prioritised programme of work to address the breach. It is hoped that the interdepartmental work now begun to develop a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan may help to reduce the risk of infraction fines and further action by the Commission.

(iv) The funding allocated to complete the building of the new Ballycastle WWTW is £10.8 million at the initial design stage. It is estimated that additional funding (of at least £750m) will be needed to progress

an integrated drainage infrastructure solution for the greater Belfast area as part of the Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan.

AQO 6561/11-15

Mr Ross Hussey (UUP - West Tyrone) To ask the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current pressures on his departmental budget.

01/09/2014

In recent years the approach adopted by the Executive has meant that I have been heavily reliant on in-year funding through monitoring rounds to provide essential services, including concessionary fares, roads maintenance and street lighting for which £16 million of additional funding was provided in the 2013-14 financial year.

This approach applies not only to Resource, but also to Capital activities and in particular structural maintenance for which I received additional funding of £58 million in 2013-14. This year there is currently a shortfall of some £65 million when assessed against the independently recommended annual requirement of £133 million to maintain the road network in its current condition. Failure to address the shortfall means that maintenance priorities will focus on responsive patching activities and only the highest priority remedial sites would receive resurfacing treatment. In addition, the current limitations on funding in this area will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the construction industry in Northern Ireland. Having identified significant Resource pressures this year and in the light of the significant pressures facing the Block I took action to reduce services to the value of £11.9 million.

I put forward resource bids of £48.4 million Resource and £130.3 million Capital in the June Monitoring Round to meet existing pressures within my Department. However, with only £5 million Resource being allocated for concessionary fares and £26.3 million for a range of Capital projects, considerable pressures still remain. Whilst I welcome these allocations the Capital allocation will not allow me to reinstate roads and street lighting maintenance activities to required levels or address the further running cost pressures which my Department faces.

In addition to the steps I have already taken to address existing pressures across my Department, I now have to find additional Resource baseline reductions of 4.4%, amounting to around £15 million for my Department.

To meet the 4.4% baseline reduction I have considered a number of measures and continue to assess the position.

As a first phase of measures I have had no option other than to stop issuing new work instructions to our contractors, who currently undertake around one quarter of our work, in the following areas:-

- footway and carriageway patching including potholes;
- grass cutting/environmental maintenance;
- gully emptying;
- road marking maintenance/renewal; and
- traffic sign maintenance/replacement.

In addition, it has been necessary to suspend the use of external contractors for the repair of street lights that fail, unless they pose an electrical hazard to the public. It is not the case that no street lighting repairs will be carried out; the Department will continue to prioritise all reported faults. Until further notice, our in-house contractor will endeavour to deal with as many street lighting defects as possible. However, they will not be able to provide the service the public would expect in normal circumstances. Priority will be given to electrical and structural safety defects, followed by large groups of lights out. Smaller groups or individual street lights that fail will be lower priority and, unfortunately, many tens of thousands of street lighting defects may not be repaired over the winter months.

However, I need to make it clear that Translink and Northern Ireland Water are also being impacted by the cuts.

While Translink is required to breakeven over a three year period, the Company is already expected to be running at a deficit of around £9 million this financial year and this may have to increase as a consequence of the Department's baseline reductions. In order that the Company remains a going concern it is vital that the Executive honours its commitment to the current concessionary fares scheme and fully funds the scheme both this year and in future years.

Northern Ireland Water will also be taking forward savings measures to mitigate the £4.2m shortfall in its agreed funding, as set out in the NI Authority for Utility Regulation's Price Control 2013 Final Determination, in addition to other emerging pressures of some £10m. This will put significant pressures on the delivery of water and wastewater services with an increased risk of sewer flooding and collapses and water bursts.